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THE HERMIT OF CASCADE CITY



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THE HERMIT OF CASCADE CITY

CHAPTER I

THE SPORT AND THE GAMESTER

THE opening scene is in Hayward City—a notable mining-town, which has contributed its share toward making for the Black Hills country a reputation and notoriety second to none in the world as a district of mineral wealth and picturesque scenery, and with the most motley group of citizens within the scope of a continent.

We conduct the reader into a strange scene within the walls of an establishment known as the "Full Hand"—an enormous hand, manufactured of wood, holding a pack of cards, and hung above the entrance giving the place its name.

It was exclusively a gambling den, run upon a large scale. No liquors were sold within the walls, and it was frequented only by the better class.

It is evening, and about the marble-top marbles under the brilliant lamp-chandeliers, are gathered men of all ages; but it is noticeable that all are quiet in demeanour, and moreover, generally well-dressed.

One figure of the throng attracted special attention—that of a woman in *male* attire.

Everybody knows and recognizes her by a nod, as she saunters about; indeed, it must be a stranger in the country of gold who has not seen or, at least, heard of the twin dare-devils—Calamity Jane and Baltimore Bess.

It was the latter who was now sauntering about the parlour of the Full Hand, watching now and then the different games, or the votaries thereof.

She pauses before a table where two men are playing poker, and looks on complacently. A glance tells her that they are strangers in the mines.

The one is a young fellow of perhaps twenty-five years—a brawny, stalwart son of the West, whose limbs speak of iron and muscle.

He was clad in a hunting-suit of some coarse dark stuff, liberally fringed with fur of the mink, while knee-boots, a belt of weapons, and a black slouch hat completed his outfit.

His face was one that many would fancy—a dark face, with Spanish blood coursing through the veins—a face that though dark was capable of expression soft and tender.

The man's companion was a florid, fat-faced individual, with sandy hair, colourless eyes, and a luxuriant pair of "Burnsides," which ever and anon he stroked complacently. His clothing was all of the finest texture and cut; his shirt-front immaculate, and studded with diamonds, and his vest-front ornamented with a golden cable-chain. A jaunty Derby hat and a single eye-glass completed the make-up of a genuine English aristocrat.

And it appeared that the Britisher was no novice at card-playing, for he won with a regularity that was astonishing.

"See heer, Spanish!" she said, with a whistle denoting surprise, "how much has that chap wi' ther sluggins won out o' yer pile?"

The Spaniard looked up and surveyed the girl keenly.

"A square hundred, miss," he said, after a moment. "Why?"

"Because I do hate to see an Englisher get ahead o' us Americans."

The game went on and the Spaniard lost at every turn, while the Englishman smiled and stroked his beard with the grandiloquent manner of a conqueror.

"The game is mine, Sir Spaniard," he said, raking in the pile with a flourish. "You are broke, eh?"

"You have all my money," the Spaniard replied, bitterly. "I was a fool to wrestle against fate. But it is no time to back out now. I must have back my money. It is not mine, but Berenice's. Will any one loan me ten dollars to turn the game?"

There was no response.

None were there, evidently, who cared to back the gambler.

"You had a boy with you a bit ago. Just for the novelty of the thing, put him up," the Englishman said, with a strange glitter in his eyes. "He is a pert-looking lad, and I'll offset him with a hundred dollars."

The Spaniard started violently.

"Curse you!" he gasped, with a shudder. "You have it all your own way. If I lose—what then?"

"Why, naturally, I have the boy. What I win I make it a point to keep. Come, decide at once. If you wish to risk the boy, put him up and win back what you have lost—if you can. Otherwise, I'll bid you a pleasant good-night."

The Spaniard bowed his head upon his hands, a moment, evidently struggling with the temptation.

Then, a moment later, he rose to his feet, his dusky face pale and stern, and a terrible glitter in his eyes, as he gazed at the English gamester.

"I am obliged to make the venture!" he said, huskily. "It is a terrible thing for a father to risk his only child upon a game of chance, but the money I have lost belonged to Berenice. I *must* win it back, or my wife will ne'er again look upon my face."

Giving a peculiar whistle, the Spaniard called to his side the wager he was to make against his opponent—a bright-faced, sunny-haired little boy of five or six years, who was clad in trousers and jacket, with tiny top-boots upon his feet, and a small fur cap upon his wavy golden hair.

A sweet little fellow he was, and a murmur of admiration escaped the lookers-on as the Spaniard raised him upon his knee.

"Gentlemen!" the Spaniard said, "I am about to risk my little son upon a game of chance. My name is the same name that, years ago, threw the south-western gold mines into a frenzy of excitement, and I am the son of the noted road-rider, whose name I bear—*Joaquin Muriete!*"

"I am going to risk my son, Little Pet, in order that I may win back that which was intrusted to my care by a loving wife."

Joaquin kissed his child twice upon the forehead, and then stood him up on the floor by his side.

He turned to the game, like one moved by mechanism.

The crowd about the table had increased in numbers, and all stood with silent interest to watch the game.

Baltimore Bess raised Little Pet up in her arms.

"Ye purty little picter!" she murmured,

stroking back the soft sunny hair.

The game was now opened.

The Englishman was cool, confident.

The Spaniard was nervous, and trembled visibly, although he endeavoured to shake off his agitation.

He was conscious that all eyes were upon him—conscious that he was losing that which, next to a loving wife, he held dearest to his heart.

At last, he threw down the only card in his hand, and staggered to his feet, with a gasp. While the cool, cynical voice of the Britisher said:

"I am the winner, sir, the boy is mine!"

"Yes, yours!" Joaquin said, hoarsely. "My God! what a fool I have been! What a madman to believe I could change my luck!"

A hush of death prevailed within the room. Every eye was turned upon the Spaniard.

His face had grown strangely white, his limbs seemed momentarily paralyzed; he reeled like one in a state of intoxication.

"You need not fear for the welfare of your offspring, Sir Joaquin," said the winner. "As it happens that I am an English lord, I'll bring the little fellow up, and make a title for him."

"A *title!*" Joaquin gasped, glaring at him wildly. "A *title!* That does not give me back my child!"

"Well, no, not exactly," the other returned, with a sarcastic laugh.

"Come! bid your child adieu, for I wish to retire to my hotel!"

Joaquin gave the Britisher a glance which was far from loving, and then, turning, imprinted a hasty kiss upon the child's forehead.

"Good-bye, my poor boy!" he gasped, in a choked voice; then he staggered toward the door, tears rolling down his brown cheeks.

"Papa! papa!" Little Pet called struggling to get to the floor from Bess's arms.

At the door Joaquin paused, and gazed back. Every eye was upon him.

Every man in the room was watching him, with a spice of pity at heart.

The strong man gave a last, farewell glance at the child, his features working with emotion. Then he turned mechanically, opened the door, and was gone, out in the blackness of a moonless night.

When he was out of sight, Baltimore Bess turned and faced the Englishman, who was regarding her with a cynical glance, which brought a flush to her cheeks.

"Tell me your name!" she said, in her decisive way.

"Oh, certainly!" was the reply, and the foreigner laid a card upon the table near by. "My name is Cavendish—Lord Byron Cavendish, at your ladyship's service. In what way can I serve you?"

"Serve me?" cried Bess, scornfully. "W'en et cums thet er Englisher hes ter serve *me*, I kick the bucket, you bet! Joaquin said you should have the boy, and so here he is. But, mind you, in taking him, if ye ever so much as harm a hair of his precious little head, I'll transform ye inter a monument fer a hole in ther ground, quicker'n a bullwhacker evyer soaked p'izen!"

A loud cheer from the crowd was sufficient guarantee that the general spirit was in keeping with that of the dare-devil.

Lord Cavendish smiled defiantly, as he seized Joaquin's terrified child, and raised him in his arms.

"Don't fear that the child will suffer harm by being in my possession!" he said, moving toward the door. "*Au revoir*, all!"

He turned to make his exit, but in doing so, ran fairly against an individual who had just entered.

"Aw! I say, it's deuced unkind of you to mistake me for a battering-ram. Aw! Who is the awful swell, anyhow?" and an eye-glass was poised in front of the newcomer's left optic, while he surveyed the Englishman critically.

His lordship had also stepped back a pace in order to scan the dandified character, with whom he had collided.

For the individual in question was made up on decidedly dandyish principles, to say the least.

His immaculate white shirt and vest, and his fashionably-cut clothing were all of the best material, while the polished silk hat, a flaming red neck-tie, a ponderous gold chain strung several times across his vest, a liberal display of flashing jewellery, and a gold-headed cane, to say nothing of the exquisitely fitting patent-leathers upon his feet, were the general items of his outfit.

Evidently the English lord was in a degree startled by the apparition, for he completed his survey with a contemptuous humph.

"Who in the name of the queen are you?" he demanded, sharply.

"Hello! by all ther wildcats that evyer chawed mother-in-laws. Ef I don't know that gallus galoot, may I never ag'in be called a man o' ther peeples. Et's Rosebud Rob, the Sport, an' I'll bet my chips on it, you bet. Hyar, old pard, just lend us yer paw w'ile I wring ther grip out o' et!"

"Aw, is that you, Bessee?" the Sport

said, shaking hands with the girl. "Glad to see you! But, aw! I say, by Jove! who is the individual who bumped against me?"

"Haw! haw! Don't ye know, Rosey? That's the galoot who sets himself up ter be a lord uv creation. Cavendish is his name. He do luk like a caven sort o' dish, don't he, now?"

"Aw!" the Sport said, with a grand sniff. "A most deucedly insolent puppy—ah! 'pon honour."

"What do you mean by insulting me, you fool?" Lord Cavendish growled, advancing threateningly. "Do you know an Englishman of blood never receives insult, without retaliation?"

"Aw! is *that* true? Really, you must excuse my ignorance pertaining to English blood. Aw! you are so deucedly clever, my lord, what do you say to taking a scull—just for exercise, you see?"

And in his hands the dandy sport held a glistening pair of revolvers.

Cavendish saw them—saw that matters had an unhealthy outlook for him, and with a curse, he seized Joaquin's child in his arms again, and left the gaming house.

CHAPTER II

THE HERMIT OF CASCADE CITY

MANY miles to the north and west of Hayward City, among the mountain wilds, was one of those hidden valleys, so many of which have puzzled the surveyors of Jenny's expedition, as in many instances they closely resemble each other.

The valley was several miles long, and finally ended in the face of a large waterfall, or cascade, which leaped from crag to ledge, until it fell at last in a wide, glass-like sheet into the valley, and rushed away in foam-flecked rapids through a narrow channel.

It was the picturesque beauty of Nature's scenic hand, and one standing among the distant crags that sided the valley could but be impressed with the combined grandeur and beauty of the scene.

A fair-skinned, fair-haired young fellow, posted up among the crags was idly surveying the view through a powerful field-glass. A guess at his age would have given him not more than three-and-twenty years.

Neatly attired, and armed with weapons of a superior make, he looked wholly unlike the sportsman occasionally met with in the Western mountains. There was that in his dress and bearing which spoke both of refinement and a genial nature.

He evidently was much interested in the scene below him, for he gazed upon it long and admiringly.

"It is beautiful!" he finally murmured, lowering his glass and recasing it. "If I were an artist I should never stop short of painting the views hereabouts. In my opinion, the spot below there discounts any views I have yet seen in America. And the cabin yonder, under the shadow of the waterfall, seems singularly out of place, for I see no signs of human presence. Wonder if Cavendish will miss me? He's able to take care of himself; so here goes."

And the young baronet began to clamber down from crag to crag, in order to get into the valley.

Pausing a moment to rest, he made a discovery which he had not observed through his glass.

In spots the bottom of the valley was sandy, and these spots were staked off by little flags upon sticks. There had been channels opened here and there, and rows of sluice-boxes constructed, with a head-gate to turn off or on water from the rushing stream.

In fact, everything was handy for wash-mining, and miners' implements lay scattered about upon the ground.

"Well! well! So it chances that I have 'stumbled down and struck it rich,' as these artistes-in-digging have it," the young baronet said, with a puzzled expression. "Some one has got a mine here, all by himself. Ah! the cabin, yonder; and, as I live, there's an old man sitting in under the willow, by the door. Hurrah! I'll strike for him, as sure as my name is Tom Somerset—with a *Sir* at the extreme forepart of it!"

And, true to his word, the young tourist started off on a swift stride toward the cabin, which was several hundred yards away.

As he approached the cabin, he perceived that it had a home-like appearance. A door and a couple of windows fronted westward, and a portico shadowed the door, while over all towered a large willow.

A little pebbled path ran down to the edge of the stream, and on either side was bordered by beds of cultivated flowers, which sent forth a delicious perfume. Back of the cabin was a well-kept garden.

Under the willow-tree, in a great rustic arm-chair, sat an old man—a cripple, evidently, as a pair of crutches lay upon the ground by his side, watched over by an ugly-looking canine companion, of a decided bull-dog appearance.

The man was thin and emaciated in form and face, with a hollow look about the eyes, and a sunkenness of the cheeks, that be-

spoke the working of some disease. His hair was snowy white, but of beard he had none. As for his garments they were of the commonest material, but, at the same time, clean and unpatched.

As Tom Somerset approached in his free graceful stride, the old man attempted to rise, but sank back with a gasp of exhaustion.

"Pray do not be alarmed!" Sir Tom said, reassuringly. "I have not come to do you harm, but, rather, to beg your hospitality, for a few days, for which I will pay you liberally."

"Who are you?" the old man demanded, suspiciously, eyeing the baronet with a keen gaze. "Why have you come here?"

"For no bad purposes, let me assure you," Somerset said, taking a seat upon the rocky doorstep. "I am an English tourist, who, in company with another companion, namely, Lord Cavendish, has been doing the American continent, and seeing the sights."

"What is your name, young man?" the old man demanded.

"Sir Thomas Somerset, at your service—usually abbreviated to plain Tom Somerset, as I am, in no particular, proud of my title."

"That at least shows good sense on your part," the other replied. "My name is Abbey—Jason Abbey, though by the few who have ever visited me here, I am known as Old Elk, the Hermit."

"Then you have lived here long, sir?"

"Ay!—long as ten years: before the gold fever broke out into a blast in the Black Hills, I worked my way here, and built my home, with the intention of becoming a recluse from the wiles and villainy of a wicked world. Since the day I first entered it, I have never left this valley, but twice. So you see, I have been a hermit, in the true sense of the word, young man."

"Indeed, yes. You must have had strong cause for isolating yourself so long from your fellow-men."

"Yes, there were deep and strong causes—and many of them. One, I was tired of sin and the sinning; an unseen hand pointed out to me the quiet peace of this life, and with my child, then but little better than a babe, I came."

"But, how have you been able to maintain yourself, all these years in what is yet literally a howling wilderness?"

"Until within a year past, I have been in good health, and gained a living with my rifle, and such vegetables as I could raise with my little spot of garden. Since I have become afflicted with consumption and the rheumatism, my child has taken my place."

"How old is your son?"

"My son? ha! ha! I never was blessed with a son. Idyl is a girl." She will be in from a hunt, soon."

"Idyl?"

"Yes. Does the name strike you as being peculiar?"

"I must admit that it does," Sir Tom replied.

"But you have not yet told me if you would give me the hospitality of your board!" Sir Tom reminded.

"Ah! I had forgotten it. Y-yes, you are welcome to stay, as long as you behave yourself, and don't go to getting spoony over my child. I welcome you as *my* guest—no more."

"You need not fear that I shall entangle myself in Cupid's net!" Sir Tom replied, with a laugh.

"I shall be much pleased to meet your daughter, sir; and I trust while I stop, I may be regarded, not as a stranger, but as a son to you.

"If you need my assistance or money——"

"Ha! ha! you would offer me money, eh?" the old man chuckled, as if there was something amusing to him in the simple idea. "Why, young man, I dare say I am worth more to-day than you, with all your titles and lordly estates! You see those claims down the valley yonder, which appear as if they had never been more than staked off. Well, sir, I have worked them patches of sand for eight long years—washed out the gold grains, and hoarded them away in amounts which would make your eyes sparkle. My riches are buried where no one but myself can ever find them, without directions from me."

"But how, pray, could you have worked so long in one or more beds of sand? There must be a bottom where there is no gold."

"I'll tell you the secret," the old man said, in a whisper. "Every new moon the water of the cascade increases in volume and washes through the valley, in some places overflowing the banks by two feet. When the flood has subsided, those spots where the water overflowed are covered with golden sands."

"Ah, yes! I see. So, when you wash out one fortune, the tide brings you another."

"Exactly."

"Well, you have indeed a bonanza. Is there no quartz ore in the immediate vicinity of this valley that would pay better than this surface dirt?" Sir Tom asked.

"None at all. The quartz formation abruptly ends many miles from here, and, also, there is no fairly-paying surface dirt

until you strike this valley. Consequently, few but hunters enter here."

"I suppose you have to bribe them to keep the secret of your fortune, eh?"

"Not at all. Those who have come have been so well received, that they would be more than ingrates to betray me in my solitude."

"Besides, what could they do to remain? You have all the best portions of the valley staked off, eh? You were first, and, consequently, are last possessor."

"Of course. They could ill afford to try and rout me out of my snug little hermitage. Besides, the mines yonder, and all the tools, belong to Idyl, to whom I sold out my interest."

"And she now does the running in place of yourself, sir?"

"Exactly. And fully as well, too. But, come into the cabin, young man, and I'll see if we cannot hunt you up something fit to eat. As the day has several hours of light yet, it is not likely my child will return immediately."

"Pray do not put yourself to the least trouble," Sir Tom replied. "Before I eat, I must beg to leave you, until I can fetch a noble horse, whom I left in the mountains. By that time, perhaps, Miss Abbey will have returned. I shall not be long, I trust!"

And then the young baronet strode away down the valley, whistling merrily.

CHAPTER III

JOAQUIN'S COTTAGE

A NEW road had been cut through the mountain wilderness. Men were at work upon it—men in masks, too, who seemingly were chary to show their faces to the light of day.

The road wound from one side of a giant mountain, in a semicircle, around to the opposite side, where it ended, uncompleted, on the jagged rocky bluffs which arose to the east of Cascade Valley.

At the eastern commencement of the road the stage trail ran through Blind Canyon and connected with it.

The length of the new road, so far as constructed, must have been eleven or twelve miles; while it yet lacked a couple of miles of debouching into the little canyon where Jason Abbey held his own.

The object in the construction of the highway was evident, for nearly midway between its two terminations stood a little shanty, in front of which a gate was

stationed. Back of the shanty was a larger extension, which was built against a face of rock. A neatly painted sign hung over the door of the shanty, bearing the inscription :

“JOAQUIN’S TOLL-GATE.”

A woman sat upon the steps of the shanty, glancing ever and anon up and down the newly-finished dugway, while her deft fingers plied the needles that were working into shape a beautiful zephyr shawl.

A plainly-attired, unpretentious little body this woman—young even below the age of nineteen, if one could judge by appearances.

“Dear Joaquin, and Pet !” she murmured softly, as the needles clicked merrily together. “How I have missed them both. Joaquin promised me his stay should be short—yet, he has already been gone over a week. Can it be that he has gone back to the gaming-table again? No, God forbid ! He promised me with the last kiss that he would not play a game, and I cannot believe he would break his word.

“And, yet, I cannot account for his tardiness. He was to take the last money, which my father left me, and purchase powder with which to complete the blasting of our road. Then, we shall begin to realize the returns for our investment. The labourers can be discharged, and with the income brought in by the toll-travel, oh ! how nicely we could live !”

Presently her gaze fell upon a horseman coming up the road and she arose to her feet with a little cry of delight and waved her zephyr-work in the air, for she recognized in the newcomer her husband, as well as his snow-white steed.

But the enthusiastic glow suddenly died out of her face and eyes, and she reeled back, a sudden compression of her lips making her appear grim and stern.

She leaned against the door-post for support, and glared toward the approaching horseman, as if she were uncertain whether to stay or flee.

Was she dreaming—or had she suddenly gone mad ?

Little Pet was not with Joaquin !

No ! not with him ; and the sharp eyes of the wife detected the hesitation of the husband in approaching—saw a guilty flush upon his face, a sullen gleam in his dark eye.

Nearer and nearer the horse of the husband approached, until it stopped in front of the gate, and Joaquin Muriete sat, with folded arms, and bowed head.

“Joaquin !”

Berenice spoke the name with its full Spanish accent—spoke it in a tone of immeasurable contempt, mingled equally with sternness and pity—in a tone that caused Muriete to tremble visibly. But he commanded himself by a master effort, and raised his eyes to meet her burning gaze.

“Berenice, I return alone !” he said, hoarsely. “Do not ask me what has become of the child, for—for——”

“You would not tell me, eh ?” she finished, with a frightened gasp ; “but you shall tell me, Joaquin—you *shall* tell me where is our child—our little darling Pet, or I’ll——”

She hesitated to complete the sentence, and thrust a revolver she had drawn back into the folds of her dress.

“Tell me where is our child ?” she gasped, when she could find power to speak again.

“Dead !” he replied, with another bitter chuckle, “dead, forever, to you and me ! Do not chide me, Berenice, but hear me out.”

Berenice bowed her head with a groan of anguish. She yearned, yet feared, to hear the worst.

“As I said, the child is forever dead to you and me,” Joaquin went on. “I gambled him away, as well as the money which you gave me to purchase powder with. I shall not attempt to apologize for myself. I broke my promise to you in a weak moment, and gambled away your child. I ask you not to forgive me—I crave but one boon from you !”

“What ?” Berenice asked, calmly.

She has just found a new-born power of control over her heart—over her emotions.

“You shall know !” Joaquin said, leaping from his saddle to the ground, and drawing a revolver. “Here, take this weapon, and put a bullet through my heart !”

His bitterness of tone was proof enough that he was in earnest. He was not the man to joke, in such a moment as this.

Berenice shrank back with a little cry of horror.

“No ! no !” she said, with a quiver.

“Joaquin Muriete, I will not take your life, nor that of any man. Though as fierce blood runs in my veins as in yours, I will not do murder by way of satisfying a revengeful craving. God joined our hands together as man and wife. The bond is henceforth broken. Our paths diverge, here ; you go your way, I go mine !”

“Berenice !”

“Nay ! do not speak to me, in that way. I no longer can be moved to even respect the man who would gamble away his

child!" she cried, passionately. I go, now, never to return, until you bring me back that of which you have robbed me!"

She turned back into the shanty, with a cold bow, and after she was gone, Joaquin, Jr., sat down upon a little bench, which stood near at hand, and bowed his head, while tears coursed down his brown cheeks.

Berenice came out, presently, with a firm, decided step, in which there was no faltering. A hooded cloak was fastened about her shoulders, and she carried a small bundle.

"I have taken what few clothes I may need to wear," she said, pausing a moment, and gazing keenly up and down the road. "You are welcome to the rest—can even gamble *them* away, if you choose. Good-bye, forever perhaps."

"Berenice!"

She did not reply, but walked away down the eastward road, leaving Joaquin gazing after her like a man bereft of his senses.

At last she came to a bend, around which she would pass from view of the shanty.

Would she look back?

Nearer—nearer she approached to the bend. Ha! she—goes on and passes out of sight, without turning her head in the least.

Then, there rises an awful cry upon the clear mountain air—a weird, anguished shriek.

Joaquin Muriete lies flat upon the ground, as bereft of consciousness as the grey mountain crags that loomed around him.

His horse gives a whinny, and like a faithful dog, approaches his master. He smells the body over—even seizes the leathern waist-belt by his teeth, and raises Joaquin partly from the ground.

But as the limp body sags back a wonderful understanding seems to possess the noble animal, for with a louder whinny he leaps the gate and dashes up the more newly finished part of the road, until, at last, he brings up at a point where scores of masked men are digging on the mountain-side.

"Hello! Joaquin's horse by all the miracles!" exclaimed one stalwart, smooth-faced fellow, pausing in his work, as the animal approached with a whinny and rubbed his nose upon his shoulder, after which he trotted back in the direction whence he had come. "What ails the beast?"

"Somethin's up—gone wrong!" spoke another. "If I's you, Lieutenant Phil, I'd go see what it's about."

"Yes, I think I'll run down to the gate, and see if everything's right there," was the reply. "It's getting on toward night;

half a dozen of you may follow me on foot."

And, calling the white, the lieutenant vaulted into the saddle, and dashed down the road.

In the meantime another horseman from the opposite direction came up the new highway, and leaping from his saddle on arriving in front of Joaquin's cottage approached the body of the fallen chief.

He was none other than the young baronet, Sir Tom Somerset!

After leaving the cabin of the Hermit of the Cascade Gulch, he had re-entered the mountains, and, though he had found the horse, he became puzzled, and finally quite lost. Chancing into Blind Canyon he had stumbled into the newly-made toll road curving around the mountain.

"Hello! I wonder what ails this poor fellow?" the baronet muttered. "I see no signs of his having been foully dealt with. Here is water handy; I'll see if I cannot resurrect him from this stupor. Ha! was the woman I met with down the road anything to him?"

Raising the body in his arms, the baronet dragged it within the shanty, the first room of which was neatly but rudely furnished. Here he laid him upon a couch of skins, and seizing a basin, proceeded to catch some water that trickled down across the road.

Returning to the shanty, he then bathed the chief's forehead, and poured a few drops of Nature's sparkling liquor between his lips.

Joaquin gave a shiver, and opened his eyes directly with a start.

"Ha! who are you!" he gasped, as his sharp, wild gaze fell upon the stranger.

"My name is Somerset, at your service!" Sir Tom replied. "Chancing to become lost in the mountains, I followed the new road, and came to where you were lying in front of this shanty. I dragged you in here, and set to work to restore you to consciousness."

"Y-es!" Joaquin mused, passing his hand over his forehead. "I remember now—I fainted. I thank you, Mr. Somerset, for manifesting so much interest in my behalf. But stop! Before you go, let me ask you a question. Which direction did you come from?"

"From the east, sir."

"Ha! I thought so. Did you—did you see anything of a woman going eastward along this trail?"

"I did, sir. She was alone, and carried a bundle of clothing. I made an attempt to ask her concerning my shortest route to Cascade Valley, when she uttered a wild laugh, and sped on as if all the evil spirits were after her!"

"You speak of the Cascade Valley," Joaquin, Jr., said, as he paced moodily up and down the floor. "What would you have there?"

"Nothing more than a few days of rest, I assure you," Sir Tom replied. "I chanced down there earlier to-day, and engaged accommodation for a short stay. I am now endeavouring to find how I can easiest get my horse and myself back into the vale."

For some time Muriete did not speak, but paced to and fro with a keen glance anon at Sir Tom, who was awaiting the issue.

At last, however, he walked to a desk in one corner of the room soon to return with a small golden stiletto lying in the palm of his hand. It was a mere toy, such as might be attached as the "charm" to a watch-chain, but Joaquin gazed at it sternly.

"Take this," he said, handing it to Sir Tom. "Take it, and never be without it. Night and day have it fastened in plain sight. Now go! No, stop! I will first tell you my name. It is Joaquin Muriete, Jr. Perhaps you may hear the name again. And mind you, offer no harm to that little fairy of Cascade Gulch, if you would *live*. Go now! Mount your horse and pass on up the road; if you are stopped, show the stiletto, and demand to be shown the easiest way into the Cascade Gulch!"

Sir Tom bowed respectfully, and stepping from the shanty he mounted his trained horse.

CHAPTER IV

CASCADE CITY LOOKING PROMISING

SIR TOM SOMERSET galloped away up the new mountain road, his mind busied with the mystery concerning matters at the cottage.

"Joaquin!" he muttered. "I have heard that name mentioned in connection with the gold fever in California. Ha! here comes a horseman, and he is masked, at that!"

It was the man whom we have previously mentioned as Lieutenant Phil. He was mounted upon Joaquin's white horse, and bound toward the toll-gate. But he drew rein in the middle of the road as Sir Tom came up, and in one hand he held a pistol ready for use.

"Halt!" he commanded. "You can go no further without paying toll. As I am acting agent for Muriete's toll-road, I'll be lenient, and charge you only a V!"

Sir Tom laughed.

"I guess you are playing with the wrong

trigger," he said, drawing the golden stiletto. "Joaquin himself assured me that this would pass me over the road."

"Ha! the signal-sign. Very well, sir: since you possess that, you are at liberty to pass on. But tell me first, what has happened at the gate?"

"You, perhaps, can best learn that," Sir Tom replied. "I found your chief lying in front of the shanty, but succeeded in fetching him back to consciousness. I left him at the shanty."

With a bow the lieutenant put spurs to his horse, and dashed on toward the toll-gate, while Sir Tom continued upon his journey.

He had no difficulty in passing the men who were working upon the road, after he exhibited the stiletto; and one of them pointed out the easiest way of descending into the valley beyond.

So by the time it was fully dark he rode up in front of the Hermit's cabin, and dismounted with a sigh of relief.

The evening was warm, and the old man sat in his arm-chair under the weeping willow, smoking away at his pipe.

"So you have arrived, eh?" he said, raising himself upon his crutches and hobbling forward. "Take the bridle from your horse, and turn him out to graze. There's supper for him in the valley, and supper for you in the cabin."

Tom made haste to obey—and then followed the Hermit into the main apartment of the cabin, which answered equally the purpose of kitchen and parlour.

Upon the table was a common tea-set and a meal, consisting of bread, milk, butter and cold meat, with wild pear-sauce.

"Be seated, and help yourself," the Hermit said, pointing to the table. "We ate before you came."

It was upon Sir Tom's tongue to ask where the other one of the "we" was, but he restrained his impatience, and finished his meal.

Afterward they adjourned to the open air to smoke, for Sir Tom carried a stock of choice cigars. The old man occupied his chair, while Sir Tom seated himself upon the doorstep.

"I see you are to have a highway put through the valley," he observed, carelessly. "I presume you are already cognizant of the fact?"

"Yes," the Hermit replied, with a nod.

"I am powerless to help it. My heritage will soon be a matter of the past."

"The road will naturally bring in prospectors and adventurers, and will you not be in danger of being robbed?"

"Robbed!" the old man echoed, with a start—"robbed! Of what?"

"Of everything—of your hidden wealth of your claims, yonder—ay! of that you prize most, your daughter, Miss Idyl."

"But who would rob me, young man? Who would molest a man who has no enemies?"

"Oh! there are hundreds—thousands who would do it, for the sake of gold, or to satisfy evil desires. You have been so long shut out from the world, that I fear you would harbour evil, unsuspectingly!"

"Ha! then you mean that your coming bodes me evil, sir?"

"No; on the contrary, my coming insures you a true and lasting friendship. But I was referring to the class of adventurers who must soon come into this gulch. You will awake some morning to find a miniature city surrounding you, peopled by a heterogeneous swarm of humanity. I wish to arouse you to a true sense of danger, for I feel it in my bones that danger will come. You must be on your guard if you intend to remain here."

"And you tell me this without a selfish object behind it all?"

"I tell you it with no object in view, except to keep danger away from a helpless man and a weak woman!" Sir Tom replied.

At this juncture a peal of merry, girlish laughter rang out just behind Sir Tom, causing him to involuntarily leap to his feet with a start.

"Ha! ha! ha! A weak woman! Ha! ha! ha! Did you hear him, papa?"

And the next moment a trim, girlish figure stepped out of the cabin, half-convulsed with laughter, which, evidently, was not affected; but which brought unconscious blushes to Sir Tom Somerset's cheeks.

"Did you hear him, poppy?" cried the sprite, again. "He called me a weak woman! Ha! ha! ha!"

And a fair, roguish face, and a pair of sparkling brown eyes were turned full upon the baronet, who was gazing at her in surprised admiration.

The Hermit had not underestimated the attractions of his child. She was seventeen years of age, or thereabouts, with a well-rounded, willowy form, perfected in each graceful contour, as was revealed by a neat-fitting, semi-feminine hunting costume of pliable deerskin.

In addition to the deerskin costume, there were dainty boots upon the shapely feet, and a slouch hat set jauntily back from the fair, open forehead.

No weapons wore this gazelle of the wilderness, to outward view—unless, as Sir Tom inwardly concluded, they were her mischievous eyes.

After the last words uttered by the Hermit's daughter, there was an awkward pause of a moment; but the old man at last came to the rescue.

"Sir Tom," he said, "this is my child—my Idyl. Idyl, Sir Thomas Somerset, of Derbyshire, England."

"I am happy to welcome you to our wilderness home, sir," she said, frankly extending her hand. "I am sure papa and I ought to be proud of being honoured by your coming—we have visitors so seldom, you know."

"It would need scarcely human presence to make me enjoy the wild spot you have chosen for a home, Miss Abbey; yet the wild, romantic beauty, together with the presence of your father and your charming self, combine to offer for my visit all the pleasure I could desire. And now, let me apologize for my uncomplimentary reference to you as a weak woman. Is it not enough for me to say that I have changed my mind entirely?"

"Quite enough, sir. I thank you for the unneeded compliment. Now, you will excuse me, I hope, for the duties of a house-keeper demand my attention."

Sir Tom bowed respectfully, and his eyes followed her until she was inside the cabin, flitting busily about her duties.

Then he turned to the Hermit.

"Well?" the old man grunted, interrogatively.

"She is a beauty, indeed," was all the baronet said on that subject, for he seemed desirous of changing the channel of their conversation.

They sat under the willow, and talked on various topics until the moon showed her face over the mountain range with a brilliant flood of yellow light.

Then the Hermit directed Sir Tom which room to occupy and hobbled away into the cabin, with the announcement that it was his bedtime.

We pass over a month before we look down again upon Cascade City, as the Hermit had, from the first, named the spot he had selected for his home. We remember Sir Tom Somerset's prediction; we look with the expectation of seeing changes, and we are not disappointed.

The old Hermit's cabin stands in under the shadow of the great cascade the same as before, surrounded by its garden and beds of flowers; and, on warm days, the old man still sits in his arm-chair beneath the giant willow, as of yore.

The rushing stream darts through its channel with a roar only second to that of a cascade, and there are no changes—no

nventions yet to turn it from its course.

On the shores, however, there are changes, within a month.

A quarter of a mile from the hermitage there are shanties and cabins scattered on the shore of the stream, and here and there the gulch valley, to the number of a couple of score.

Men are seen, too, digging about, here and there; horses are grazing further on down the valley; a general appearance of new settlement is seen about.

To the east, a stage-road winds down into the valley from far up among the rocky crags.

Sir Tom Somerset still lingers at the Hermitage, which, we may add, has been enlarged to the dimensions of a frontier hotel, with a bar, and boarding and sleeping accommodations attached.

A queer, green-goggled, little old lady had come over from Deadwood, and induced the Hermit into the venture; had enlarged the place at her own expense, and in consequence, was doing a thriving business.

But, the old Hermit shook his head, as, with Sir Tom, he sat in under the willow one evening.

"I don't like the change a bit!" he said. "The old quiet of the place is gone, and disorder reigns."

"The same with me!" the young baronet replied. "You made a wrong move, when you let that woman build on against you."

"Yes! yes! I see it, now. Experience is a good eye-opener, Sir Tom. I thought to relieve Idyl, my child, of the indoor work, so that she could be as free as the eagle. Well! well! I suppose we shall have to put up with it. The thing won't last long, if they do not get gold, which they are not likely to. Do they show any disposition to crowd over on to Idyl's claims?"

"So far, no. One can't tell what they may do, though they appear like peaceable fellows."

"Humph! It's about time for another moon-tide. Has Idyl washed out all the paying, in her claim?"

"I hardly know, Mr. Abbey. You have probably noticed that your daughter has given me the cold shoulder of late, and therefore, I am in the dark concerning her."

"Eh?" the old man grunted, leaning forward, and peering into the baronet's face—"given ye the cold shoulder, has she? Well! well! What have you been doing, Sir Tom?"

"Alas! you've propounded a poser, now! I'm in total ignorance as to the origin or cause of Miss Abbey's coolness toward me!"

"Where is the child now?"

"That I am unable to tell you, unless she is in the bar-room. Of late she goes there at the close of each day's labour, and has her gold weighed, I believe."

The old man arose and hobbled into his portion of the cabin. A door had been cut through the wall, and communicated with the bar-room of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment.

Into the bar-room the Hermit made his way upon his crutches.

There were several of the miners clustered at the bar, who had come to the valley, and they regarded him with curious glances.

Paying little attention to those at the bar, the old man approached where Idyl was standing at the weighing counter, watching the clerk, a Mr. Sam'l Skinner, as he weighed out the dust and grains of gold.

"Idyl!" the old man said, touching her on the shoulder, "when you have done here, come into our part of the cabin. I want to speak with you"

She nodded, without speaking, and the old man hobbled back into the old cabin, which was reserved as his own. After Sam Skinner had finished weighing her gold, Idyl rejoined her parent, who was sitting out under the willow tree, in his great arm-chair.

"Well, poppy, what is it?" she asked. "What do you want of me?"

"Sit down and I will tell you. Now, why is it that you are so cold in your demeanour toward our guest, Sir Somerset? Tom is a good boy, and I supposed you were getting along finely together until——"

"He told you to the contrary!" Idyl finished, scornfully.

She would have turned away, but at this moment the Hermit called her back.

"Idyl! Idyl! child, stop! You must tell me what has caused your coldness toward Sir Tom. He is a noble fellow is rich and inherits proud blood. I had hopes for you in that direction, my pet."

"Then I must banish them for you, father. Between me and Sir Tom Somerset, there is nothing—never will be. If I were inclined to marry any one, there are scores I would choose from before him!"

She turned and went around the cabin toward the saloon.

The stage was just coming in, laden inside and out with passengers, both male and female.

CHAPTER V

THE SPORT'S DEBUT

The stage drew up before the portals of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment and began

to discharge its freight of humanity, which consisted of all classes and types, such as yet is found in any mining strike,

Idyl stood at one corner of the cabin, watching the busy throng which unloaded, with a curious gaze.

It all seemed very strange to her, after having been reared in the solitudes as a hermit's daughter. She could not remember of having ever seen so many men at one time in her life as were disembarking from the four-team stage, driven by sturdy Jake Johnson, whom the Abbays knew, as he had often been in the valleys hunting ere he had taken to the stage.

"A big heap on 'em, Miss Idyl," the brawny son of Wisconsin said, touching his hat respectfully, as he approached where Idyl was standing. "Nevyer heerd thet ar' stage grunt so as she did under thet cargo. Whoop 'em up, Eliza! but thar ar' a heap o' eccentric cusses among 'em, miss, an' ef ye don't see high times heer at ther Cascade my name ain't Jake Johnson—you bet on that!"

"What do you mean, Jake, by high times?" Idyl asked.

"How do I mean, leetle gal? Waal, now, I don't mind tellin' you thet an artist in grave-digging, wouldn't do so bad ter set up a coffin an' toomb-stun factory eround hayr, bein's my stage ter-night hes fetched in about as tough a crew as evyer sot fut in thur diggin's. Thar's Cross-eyed Mike, frum Deadwood, ter start wi'. After him thar's ther gallus coon they call Rosebud Rob, ther dare-devil gal Baltimore Bess, an' a couple as calls 'emselves Professor Bomberscoot, an' Mrs. General George Washington Bounce. Durn my buttons ef thet latter critter hesn't made luv ter every consarned pilgrim aboard ther stage, durin' ther trip. A reg'lar old husband hunter ar' thet woman, you bet!"

And happy Jake went whistling away, while Idyl, out of curiosity, stepped into the bar-room, to see what was going on.

The bar-room was now full, to overflowing, with humanity, but she managed to gain a position near the protective hand of genial Sam Skinner, where she could watch those around her.

Among others who came under Idyl's gaze, was a well-formed, exquisitely-dressed dandyish individual, whom everybody called Rosebud Rob.

His was the appearance and genuine make-up of a sport. His garments were elegant, both in quality and fit.

The handsome, moustached face of the Sport, with its self-reliant expression, in whose hidden meaning were courage and

resolution, and the keen dark eyes, with their magnetic influence, all attracted the attention of Idyl, from the instant she had caught sight of him.

Her thoughts were upon him, as was her gaze, when there came a loud, bawling shout through the bar-room, and a brawny giant of a fellow pushed his way roughly through the crowd toward where the girl miner was standing.

"Hooray!" he bellowed, at the top of his brazen lungs, with a broad oath, "who sez Cascade City hain't got purty weemin? Whar's that same galoot as durst say thet thar ain't purty angels hyar in thes hemisfeer? I'm Cross-eyed Mike Gasket, pilgrims, ef ye wanter know who I be; I'm ther man who keeps tally o' his conquests o' death and luv wi' a conductor's bell-punch, an' when I roar ev'ry galoot's a-tremblin'. Hooray! whar's ther man, now? Jest feast yer eyes on thet leetle baby yonder, my royal Bengal tigers. Jest score et down, how sweet she aire, will ye?"

And the giant bully stood glaring at Idyl, with a wolfish, greedy gleam in his eyes, that sent a thrill of terror through her frame, and caused her to tremble violently.

"All I hev ter do," continued the bully, "ar' ter kiss a woman, an' she ar' henceforth a worshupper o' my beauty ferever, you bet! An' ef ye don't b'lieve et, jest watch me."

A cheer went up from the giant's backers, as with a hitch at his breeches, he spat on his hands, and advanced a step toward Idyl.

But it was only a step!

"Stop!" she cried, suddenly levelling a pistol at his heart; "stop, you big wretch!"

"Stop, you cross-eyed son of a buzzard!" cried a second ringing voice, and Rosebud Rob pushed through the crowd and stood by Idyl's side, his arms folded across his chest, but a handsome revolver nevertheless, clutched in either hand. "If you want to kiss anybody, come and chaw a piece out of my lip!"

"Hip! hooray! them's my sentiments, too," cried a third voice, and the well-known face and figure of Baltimore Bess was ranked on the defensive.

"Oh, ho! thet's yer game, eh?" the giant growled, seeing several of the miners step over. "Waal, we'll see about thet. I ain't fer fightin' a hull regiment, but ef any o' ye valiant pilgrims want ter step out an' measure length wi' me fer cash, why thar's no flunk in me, you bet!"

"Do you mean that for me?" the Sport demanded, fastening the rosebud more securely in his buttonhole.

"Perzactly fer ye," the giant replied, with a leer.

"Then if you'll step outside, I allow that I am most happy to accommodate you," Rosebud Rob said, coolly.

"Don't!—oh, don't fight! please," Idyl cried, in sudden alarm, tugging at the Sport's arm. "Don't fight that great monster. He will kill you. Oh! how can I forgive myself for getting you into this trouble?"

"Trouble, lady? Why, you are not in the least to blame—and as for the trouble, 'tis *fun* instead of trouble, I assure you."

He then turned to Cross-eyed Mike.

"I am ready, you big booby. I guess it is light enough outside for our purpose. Get your rifle, and I'll join you, directly!"

"Hold up yer horses!" the giant roared. "I hain't a-goin' ter grip no shutin'-iron, nor nuthin' like et, I tell ye. Ther rib-ticklin' carver is my holt ef ye please!"

"Very well!" Rosebud Rob replied, calmly. "I am equally handy with it. But, as you have chosen the weapons, where it was my place, permit me to say which way the fighting shall be done?"

"Yas, go ahead," Gasket replied, with a brutal chuckle. "I don't keer w'ich way, so long's I git one pass at ye. Thet will settle ther debate, an' I'll ring my bell-punch o' death fer ther sixtieth time!"

The punch in question was a nickel-plated affair, with two thumb-springs, each of which when pressed rang a bell within, and registered one upon a dial. It was worn by the ruffian, strung across his breast, making a peculiar ornament.

Every time he took a human life, as he had in scores of instances, the ruffian was credited with ringing the bell. Upon the outside was the inscription—"Death."

"As we are to use knives for this contest, we will remain in this room, gentlemen," said Rosebud Rob, coolly. "Please pass to one side of the room, so that none of you may get hurt. Sir Tough, you will place your back against one end of the room, with me on the opposite end. The distance between us is about twelve yards, I should say. You are to be provided with five knives, and I with an equal number. At a given signal by the bartender, who is a disinterested party, we will hurl the knives at each other, with the intent, of course, to kill. I trust the spectators will see that there is fair play. Both men must stand up to the work, or be held up, until the best man has hurled his last weapon."

A deathlike silence reigned in the bar-room, at the conclusion of the Sport's words.

Cross-eyed Mike glared at the Sport a moment, half admiringly; then turned with

a fierce, ugly laugh, and threw off his jacket.

"I'm ther huckelberry fer thet kind o' bizness!" he said, grimly.

The space was cleared, as directed by Rosebud Rob.

Knives, to the number of five to each, were procured from the spectators.

Before taking his position, Rosebud Rob glanced keenly about him—the longest, perhaps, into the pretty, scared face of Idyl Abbey.

She drooped her gaze beneath the strange, inquiring one of the Sport. When she glanced up again he had turned and placed his back against the eastern wall of the bar-room.

Cross-eyed Mike had done the same, and stood with a knife in either hand, while three others were stuck in his belt.

The bartender had mounted the bar; every man nearly in the room had drawn a weapon, to enforce fair play.

Baltimore Bess stood near to Idyl, and as she saw the white face hastened to give assurance.

"Don't git skeered, little gal, for thar ain't no harm goin' ter cum ter thet Sport, an' don't ye fergit it."

"Gents!" cried the barkeeper, standing to his full height, with a pair of large-calibre revolvers in hand, "aire ye ready fer ther sermon ter begin?"

"All ready heer!" the giant announced, with a hoarse chuckle.

"Ditto here," Rosebud Rob assented, coolly.

"Karect! Step one pace forward, so as yer arms kin hev full play."

The order was obeyed.

"Now right hands raised, ready to hurl a knife apiece!"

The right hands were raised, and the heavy hunting-knives poised for the hurling, according to each man's notion. Then there was a breathless pause, of several minutes' duration.

Simmonds, the barkeeper, gazed over the crowd of expectant faces below—saw that every man had drawn a weapon to insure fair play.

"One!" he cried, suddenly and sharply—"let 'em drive when I say three, gents. *Two!* Take keer—*THREE!*"

The words were barely formed in sound, when there was a sudden move of two right arms and the weapons of the contestants went hurtling through the air with an ominous whiz.

Ha! a frightful howl of pain comes from the cross-eyed giant, and he leaps about like an infuriated wild beast.

The keen-bladed knife of the Sport has

neatly shaved off the right ear of his opponent, close to the skull, and then buried itself in the log of the wall. While a shout goes up from the spectators, as Rosebud Rob is seen standing erect, unhurt, and as cool as an iceberg, to all appearances.

Gasket's knife had gone wide of its mark. "Order!" roared Simmonds, from on top of the bar. "Git back ter yer place, Cross-eye, or you're a dead man. Some one stanch the flow of blood, please!"

Ready hands bandaged up the giant's wound, and beneath the gaze of a dozen or more revolver muzzles, he cowered back to his end of the room, and drew a second knife, with a string of curses.

"Get ready!" cried Simmonds.

Baltimore Bess was in ecstasies, while Idyl stood with a pale face, and dilated eyes. She had never witnessed such a terrible battle; she could not speak; when she would have left the room, her limbs refused to move.

"Hurray! warn't thet did skientific, now?" Bess cried, excitedly. Just watch thet Sport, now. He's gittin' ready fer ernuthor fling. Ten ter one he cuts thet tough's head clean squar' off."

The words startled Idyl back into herself once more; her limbs no longer refused to move. She glided to the side of the Sport, and laid one hand upon his arm, appealingly.

"Don't!" she said, in a low, tremulous voice—"don't kill the man—for my sake!"

"For your sake?" Rosebud Rob said, gazing down into the pretty face, with sudden admiration in his eyes. "For your sake, miss? You must have some pur-tickler passion, then, fer sech cowards as thet cuss yonder."

"No! no! I despise him, even more than you do. But I don't want murder done here, in Cascade City."

"But ut wouldn't be murder, I reckon, to drop thet galoot!"

"Yes, it would. Promise me not to kill him, to-night."

"I promise!" the Sport said, watching the girl, as she hurried back to the side of Baltimore Bess.

"Cum young feller wi' ther rosebud—are ye ready?" Simmonds cried.

"Quite ready!" the Sport replied.

"An' ye, Cross-eyes?"

"Give's the word!" the giant said, with a voice like a bull's roar.

He had poised his knife, and was evidently counting upon a sure stroke for victory.

"Ready, gents!" cried Simmonds, briskly. "One, two, three!"

The word had scarcely passed his lips ere the knives left the hands of the duellists,

and went whizzing ominously through the air.

A wild, awful yell came from the giant, while the crowd broke into a simultaneous shout of astonishment.

What did it mean? Was the cool Sport, who stood unhurt at his end of the room—was he possessed of the art of witchcraft? It would seem so.

For this last shot was no less than wonderful.

The Sport, upon hurling his weapon, had given it a send-off something after the manner in which the native of the South Sea Islands hurls his boomerang: it had made a peculiar curve in its flight, and the sharp blade, in passing close to the giant's face, had completely *clipped off the extreme end of his nose!*

CHAPTER VI

OLD FOES MEET

Yes, it was even so!

The man with the bell-punch was minus one ear and the end of his nose, of which he was ever proud, as he had got it coloured as finely as ever the jolly German coloured his meerschaum.

And with howls and oaths of despair and rage, the giant, blood-blinded, as it were, drew another knife from his belt and poised it, waiting for the signal to hurl it at his cool and defiant young foe opposite.

The latter was similarly prepared, and at the word they let fly.

Cross-eyed Mike's weapon just grazed the left shoulder of the Sport.

The knife of Rosebud Rob went wide of its mark, and a murmur from the spectators was sufficient guarantee that they did not believe the Sport had made the miss without a purpose.

Again the duellists took their stand.

Again they hurled the knives, Gasket's weapon carrying away a piece of the Sport's coat-sleeve; while the latter's knife went quivering into the log wall not an inch away from the one previously thrown.

But one knife apiece now remained to be thrown.

Cross-eyed Mike grasped his, with a chuckle.

"I'm jest gittin' my hand in!" he said, fiercely. "I'll split the cuss's skull open this time, an' then gobble up thet bit o' feminine kaliker over yander, arfter I've tolled my bell punch!"

Pretty Idyl shrank nearer to Baltimore Bess, as she heard the ruffian's threat and caught his gloating glance.

"Don't be skeered, leetle one!" Bess whispered, reassuringly.

The men took their relative positions; the word was given by Simmonds; the missiles flew through the air swiftly.

There was a groan and a heavy fall at the giant's end of the room. The butt of the knife-hilt had struck him endwise, between his organs of sight, and ended the duel, as had been the intention of the Sport, for he cast a contemptuous glance at the fallen bully, and turned away.

A shout of deafening applause rent the air, and a crowd surrounded the Sport, with expressions of admiration and congratulation.

Idyl now took the opportunity to slip from the room, and run around to her own part of the cabin.

She found Sir Tom Somerset sitting in the doorway, but Old Elk the Hermit, was nowhere in sight.

"Where is papa?" she demanded, breathlessly, pausing in front of the young baronet, as he did not arise to let her pass.

"He retired some time ago, I believe, Miss Idyl," was the reply. "I suppose you know it's past his bedtime."

"No! what time is it? I was so——"

"Engrossed in a low saloon brawl that you had forgotten yourself," he finished, with biting sarcasm. "It is twelve o'clock, Miss Abbey—high time, I should say, for you to be in bed!"

A flush of resentment went rioting over her pretty face.

"Sir? You use strange words—and you a guest at that!"

"A paying one, however," he returned, lightly. "I am under no obligations to either you or Mr. Abbey, except for the first few days of my stay here."

"Why do you remain?" she demanded suddenly, turning the full power of her eyes upon him.

"I remain because I want you," he replied, in a low, passionate voice; "because I am determined to win you yet, and carry you away when I go."

"Then let me dissipate any such a hope," she replied, coldly. "I can never be anything more to you than a friend. You had better know this now, than later. Go back to your English home, and forget that you ever met Idyl Abbey!"

"No! no! I cannot, Idyl——"

"You must, I say. You are only making yourself miserable by remaining here. I will plainly and candidly tell you once and for all—I do not love you, and can never be your wife."

She pushed by him then and entered the

cabin, leaving behind her one of the most wretched beings in Cascade City.

On the following morning, Idyl was up with the first streak of dawn in the east, and after a hasty breakfast, was out at her claims, working away in golden sands.

The valley was thronged, to-day, thronged with would-be miners and speculators, with roughs and sharpers, whose business was doubtful at the best.

The girl-miner accomplished but little, in the way of washing out wealth, for she was repeatedly bothered by persistent inquirers, who were eager to procure a slice out of the golden cake.

General expressions of disappointment were heard on either hand.

The gulch was no bonanza, after all the excitement.

Two men were talking the matter over, as they stood near where Idyl was working.

"The girl here has got the best part, evidently," said Lord Byron Cavendish, watching her with a bold, insolent stare, which caused her to feel uneasy. "The girl's got the best claim, and consequently there is a poor show for the rest of the fellows."

"Unless their digging results in a bigger discovery," replied the second individual, a Mr. Charles Devere, of Custer City.

"I would give a good deal to possess this claim!" Cavendish muttered, lowering his tone. "Is there no way we could dethrone this girl and get the claim in our possession? A couple of clever villains like you and I ought to manage it all right."

"Hardly," Devere replied. "If the girl was here first and staked off her own, she can hold it, in spite of the—the devil!" with a sardonic laugh.

"Have you learned her name yet?"

"I believe they call her Idyl."

"Idyl! a strange name; likewise, a deuced pretty girl."

"Yes, remarkably so."

"Could we not persuade her to sell out her claim at a nominal figure, do you think?"

Devere shook his head.

"She's no fool, I'll guarantee," he said.

"Ahem! Is this claim for sale, young lady?" Cavendish ventured to ask in his oiliest tones.

"Not for sale!" Idyl replied, briefly, for she liked not the appearance of the baronet or his companion. "I have answered this same question for a matter of ten or fifteen times to-day."

"Oh! well, you needn't be so independent about it!" Cavendish said, insolently. "I've seen Indian squaws twice as polite as you."

"Sir!" and Idyl flushed hotly, "if you

come here to annoy me, you are unwelcome. You will please take your departure!"

"Eh? Go at the order of a mere chit of a girl like you?" his lordship exclaimed. "Perhaps you do not know who I am, young woman?"

"Well, now, then, who *are* you?" Idyl demanded, picking up her rifle and leaning upon it, while she surveyed the two men coolly. "Go ahead and give us a full account of yourself."

Cavendish uttered a polite oath, while Devere simply whistled.

"Come! let's go back to the hotel, Devere. I've a thought in my mind concerning this girl, which I want to whisper in your ear. Good-day, Miss Independence—*au revoir*!"

Lord Cavendish and the man, Devere, went back to the "howtel," as Mrs. Matrevis's establishment was characterized upon a creaking sign up over the door.

"The girl's a regular spitfire!" Cavendish growled, in vexation.

"She rather cooled you off," Devere laughed.

"Hang the woman! I want that spot of land, and I'm going to have it by hook or by crook! Who is the girl's father, and where does she live, I wonder?"

"There's her father, now," and the man from Custer City pointed a short distance away, where Old Elk was sitting in his arm-chair, beneath the willow, engaged in smoking his grimy pipe.

Cavendish gazed closely at the Hermit, as he approached nearer, and finally he gave a violent start, and an expression of incredulity came over his features.

"Jason Abbey! Can it be possible?" he cried, leaping forward with an oath.

"Ay!" the old man cried, seizing one of his crutches, and raising it on the defensive; "Jason Abbey! Keep back, Ronald Dorchester! keep back! or I will dash your brains out, as old as I am, and not half the man I was ten years ago!"

Cavendish, *alias* Dorchester, laughed sneeringly.

"Don't fear, old fellow! I wouldn't touch a hair of your head, were every hair a golden chain. Devere, I'll see you later."

Devere bowed. He recognized a polite hint for him to be gone, and he accordingly strolled toward the cascade, to pass away the time.

After he had gone, Lord Cavendish brought a chair from inside the cabin and seated himself in front of the Hermit, just out of reach of the oaken crutch.

"Well?" Cavendish said, with a com-

placent smirk, and he stroked his luxuriant side-whiskers. "It seems that I have found your hiding-place at last, when I was least thinking of you. Ha! ha! your surprise must have been about equal to mine."

"On the contrary, I have been expecting this," the Hermit replied, calmly—so calmly as to cause the visitor to glance at him the second time.

"Ha! ha! a good way of brushing a fly off of my nose, isn't it? Well, well, fire away, old man. I can stand any amount of verbal abuse. By the way, I see you have grown old in the last decade—older than I, even, albeit our ages used to be the same."

"Yes, grown old," was the slow reply; "but it is better to be nigh unto a glorious hereafter, than to have one's soul burdened with crime, Ronald Dorchester!"

"Indeed! Is that so? But, my dear Abbey, refrain from calling me Dorchester. My name, for the past few years, has been Lord Byron Cavendish. You see an old uncle died and bequeathed me his wealth and title."

"Come!" said the Hermit. "I do not care to prolong this interview. State your business, and go!"

"I shall take my time to that," the other announced, decidedly. "I propose to have a social chat with you."

"You have a social chat with me?" the Hermit cried, his voice rising with trembling anger; "you, who stole away my bride from her first-born child? I placed my curses upon your head then, as I do now. Because I won a woman you would have ruined, and made her my wife, Ronald Dorchester, you vowed to wreak vengeance upon me and mine. You have done so—what more do you want?"

"I want a continuation of the same, unless we can come to a settlement!" the Englishman replied, with an affected yawn. "You do not ask about your wife, Jason, as I supposed you would?"

"Ask about *her*!" the Hermit hissed, with an intense bitterness of tone—"she whom you enticed away from her husband and child. I have no wife, you accursed villain! The hour that Hellice Abbey left my roof she ceased to be anything to me or the child she bore me."

"The girl down the gulch yonder is that child, I presume?"

"The same."

"I should have judged so. She seems to possess many of your wife's traits of character. For instance, at her age in life, I see that she got so far advanced that a couple of roughs were fighting over her in the bar-room last evening."

"A couple of roughs, sir?" exclaimed a cool, cynical voice, and a trim, dandyish figure stepped around the corner of the cabin. "Allow me to correct your mistake, and at the same time tender you an invitation to meet me, at your earliest convenience. A 'rough' implies that which is of no credit to a thoroughbred gentleman, and I thought it might be just as well to have a pistol duel on the subject now, as at any later period."

Cavendish uttered an oath and leaped to his feet.

Before him stood the sportive notoriety, Rosebud Rob, the same cool sharp, whose name was being handled in awe by the gossiping miners, wherever his advent had taken place.

"What do you mean, you accursed eavesdropper?" growled Cavendish, savagely. "I'll teach you manners!"

"My challenge just now would seem to imply that I was willing to take a few lessons from you, my lord," Rosebud Rob replied, satirically.

"What! I fight *you*?" Cavendish gasped, as if seized with sudden horror at the thought. "Why, you insignificant puppy, I'd disdain to touch the point of a weapon with you—I would, 'pon my honour. You see, I never fight, except with a gentleman."

"Indeed? Then you are afraid to fight with me, eh?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why don't you accept the challenge, you cowardly sneak?"

Cavendish trembled, with suppressed rage. To be called a "cowardly sneak" was the height of insult; yet he was aware that he must not fight with the cool Sport if he would preserve his own life.

"You shall be satisfied," Cavendish gritted, "but not now; another time will do just as well."

"Certainly," the Sport replied, with a quiet smile. "I'll give you time to square up your earthly accounts, and to determine which way you would prefer to be sent off. Until then I bid you an affectionate adieu."

And, with a mocking laugh, the dandy of the mines walked away.

Cavendish watched him with a black frown for several minutes, then turned upon the Hermit, with a sarcastic chuckle.

CHAPTER VII

THE HUNTED BARONET

"THAT'S the individual who took the part of your daughter, friend Jason," he

said, resuming his seat. "No doubt you are deeply impressed with his flashy appearance and apparent bravado!"

"At the very least, he has evidently more manly principles than *you*!" the Hermit replied, bitterly. "Ronald Dorchester, tell me what you want—then go. Your presence is gall and wormwood to me."

"That is why I am delighted to stay with you," the villain replied; "but as I do not wish to be unduly hasty in worrying you out of the world, I'll state my business and go. We may as well be friends as enemies. I bear you no particular ill-will, and I am sure you could learn to have me as a son-in-law, in due time."

"What?" the Hermit gasped, half-starting from his seat. "Are you mad, man?"

"Perfectly sane, I assure you. Your girl is a pretty lass, and would make me a good wife, no doubt."

"Stop! 'Tis certainly madness to discuss such an idea," Ronald Dorchester. Before I'd see my Idyl wedded to a scoundrel like you, I'd cut her pure white throat with my own half-palsied hands!"

"Ha! ha! bravely spoken, my dear Abbey; but indicative of a weak mind nevertheless. By-the-by, do not get excited but consider matters from a rational standpoint, and when I return I shall expect to find you willing to comply with all of my requests!"

"No! Ronald Dorchester!" the Hermit hissed, as the baronet arose and walked away.

Cavendish, as we will continue to call him, walked around the cabin to the eastern side, where was the entrance to Mrs. Matrevis's saloon. He was on the eve of entering, when a touch upon the arm caused him to wheel about, with a grunt of inquiry.

But an expression of mingled curiosity and disgust came over his features when he saw who it was.

It was the eccentricity of whom Jake Johnson had spoken to Idyl—the husband-hunter, Mrs. George Washington Bounce.

Of all females, she was, perhaps, the most eccentric and ludicrous-appearing of any in the mines.

"Well, woman, what is it?" Cavendish growled, gruffly.

"Shure an' phat is it?" the woman replied. "Faix, an' there's nary a woman in the town better than mesilf, ef I do say it."

"Hang your nonsense. Tell me what you want, or go along with your accursed baggage."

"A divil a bit o' baggage hev I at all, yer honour. It's a poor lone widdy I am, shure, who be buffetin' the say of adversity, wid nary a hope for ther future except to find a foine gentleman to take the place lift vacant in me bladine heart by the dith o' Mike Maloney. Och! wurra! a divil uv a foine husband was that same Michael, but now he's a hod-carrier up forninst the angels!"

"In the name of Heaven, woman, how does this concern me? I never saw you before!"

"Shure, but the same nade make no difference, at all. I'm a poor widdy, an' ye be a bachelor. Take me to your arms, along with all ther luv ov the Maloneys, for centuries to come."

"Nonsense! This woman is mad. Get away, you Irish vagrant!" and giving her a push, he managed to dive into the tavern and escape to his room.

While outside, Mrs. G. G. W. Bounce, glared around her for another victim, upon whom to pounce.

Rosebud Rob was standing a short distance away, conversing with Idyl. Seeing which Mrs. B. made for him unceremoniously.

"Aha! me darlint, it's meself as hev found yez!" she exclaimed, with a radiant grin, as she endeavoured to throw herself into the Sport's arms. "Shure, an' it's huntin' I've been these menny days fer yez. Divil a bit will I give ye up now."

"Confound it, what do you mean, you old lunatic? I'm no darlint o' yours!" Rosebud Rob replied, pushing her away, at arm's length. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"Och! divil a soul knows better than meself who I be. Mrs. Ginerel George Washington Bounce, at yer sarvice, tho' it's formerly the wife av Mike Maloney that I was. Shure Mike he died from a-carryin' the hod, he did, an' thin comes along an American spalpeen, bad luck to him, an' he fluthers one eye at meself, an' he sez, sez he, the omadhaun: 'Cum wid me, Biddy, ye flower av tha Emerald Isle, to that land av the frae American, an' be the wife av Ginerel George Washington; shure it's a divil av a foine time we'll have, ontirely'! Poor deluded fule that I was, I kim over the big puddle, an' we landed at Castle Garden, one mornin' in the month av August."

"Sez the ginerel to me, thin:

"Biddy, me treasure, jist be afther loanin' me the five hundred that yez got from the sale av the wee cot on the ould sod, an' wile I run forninst the bank, ye'll be rollin' away to me palace, on tha avenue. An', shure, I smelt nothing at all, an' he tuk

the money, put me into a cab containin' a man, wid brass buttons on his coat—his liveried servant I belave he called 'm—an' furst I know'd I was in a place tha called the Tombs—an' they sed as how I was 'rested, bedad, for sth'aline'. An' whin I told the spalpeens that I was Mrs. Ginerel George Washington, tha mother av me counthry, they all laughed, an' a big polaceman told me to 'bounce.' I 'bounced'! but everywhere I wint, an' told 'em who I was, they'd simply say 'bounce,' an' it's meself as kim to tha final conclusion that 'Bounce' must be a parth o' my name ontirely."

"Ha! ha! this is rich!" Rosebud Rob cried, laughing heartily, as also did Idyl.

"My good woman, what became of the 'general,' and what brings you out here in the mines?"

"Och! wurra! shure, an' they told me tha same 'gineral' was a noted—corkleg, I think tha called it, an' that he had swindled me out o' me money. Jest as if I didn't know the same! An' then I set forth in s'arch of anither husband ter take tha place av poor Mike Maloney, that is deceased."

"And you have been unsuccessful, so far, I take it?" the Sport asked.

"Faix, an' it's meself that has, that same. Divil a mon hev I met wid a heart in him at all, or an eye for thure beauty av tha desolate, soul yearnin' widdy av George W. Bounce."

"You must not be discouraged!" Rob assured, a sparkle in his eye. "The man you met at the door a bit ago, is an English lord, and no doubt if you push your case, you can strike a tender chord in his heart, and the ultimate result will be, that you discard the American name of Mrs. General George Washington Bounce, for the aristocratic English title of Lady Byron Cavendish!"

"Arrah! an' do yez really think that same, yer honer?"

"There can be no doubt of it, my dear woman. Cavendish seems to have a passion for comely women, and your case bids fair to win, if you only hang to your work with the perseverance of a bull-dog. Take my advice, don't give him a minute's peace until he makes you his wife. As an encouragement, if you succeed, I'll give you a hundred dollars out of my own pocket!"

"Och! now, but it's foolin' wid me ye be, yer honer!" and Mrs. G. W. B.'s face became gloriously illuminated.

"Not a bit of it. You do your work, and I'll stand by my word, as sure's my name is Rosebud Rob, 'a man to suit all circumstances.'"

"Thin, by the hand of the Virgin Mary! It's never a day shall go by but I pop the momentous question to the loikes of his lordship!" cried Mrs. Bounce, decidedly, and the next minute she had wheeled about, and was pacing rapidly off toward the hotel.

After escaping the daughter of Hibernia, Lord Cavendish hastened to his room, which was directly over the saloon, and found Devere there, engaged in reading a yellow-covered novel.

"Well, my lord, you evidently met an old acquaintance in the Hermit down there?" he said, looking up from his book.

"Yes; an old enemy," the baronet replied. "But, as it turns out, it may be a lucky chance that caused me to stumble upon him."

"In respect to the girl?"

"Exactly. She is pretty, and would not grace a palace so badly, after all."

"Especially when she has a princely fortune back of her beauty."

"A fortune?"

"Yes. Had you not heard the little story about the old Hermit's hidden treasure? They say he's been washing out gold in this valley for the past ten years, and that he's got it hidden away, by the bagful."

"Ha! I had not heard of this. Is there any truth in the report?"

"As to that, I am unable to say."

The Englishman knitted his brows together, darkly.

"If this be true, Devere, you and I must have that treasure," he said, in a low tone.

"We must first find out where it is secreted, and then the old man must die a seemingly natural death. Then, we can take the girl and the gold, return to the old world, and live like nabobs. How like you the picture?"

"The picture is well enough, if executed right. But, there is the stick. It's easy enough to talk, but not to act. I have just been reading of a notorious villain, at heart, who laid a plan to ruin a young man and get possession of his fortune. He manoeuvred like a good fellow, but finally was foiled, and brought to speedy justice, as villains usually are."

"Pooh! if you get your brain full of such nonsense, you may calculate to be defeated. I am no fool to imperil my neck, and consequently, we must work in extra cards, in the game. There's that rough customer they call Cross-eyed Mike for example."

"Humph! I judge he is about done for."

"Nevertheless, we could not get a better man to serve us. He has the savage

ferocity of a bulldog, and the memory of a tobacco-fed elephant."

"But a bigger coward at heart than I lived!"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean what I said. He is a coward, especially when he meets such men as that Sport, Rosebud Rob."

"Curse the Sport!" Cavendish growled, with a frown.

And rising abruptly, the villain left the room.

A week passed.

Evidently Cascade City was to be a mining-town in earnest, for some paying spots of sand had been found down the valley, and all available territory had been leased off at high figures.

But in the midst of the increasing tide of prosperity, when men could gamble if they could not mine themselves rich or poor in a single day—in the midst of all the bustle and excitement there was many a complaint raised, many a dark threat made, against one man, and that man Joaquin Muriete, Jr.

Since the opening of the new road, and, by the way, the only direct route to the new strike, the travel over it had been considerable, owing to the inflowing of the miners.

No other route was there, without making a detour of twenty or thirty miles, and this was not desirable.

Yet, not a stage—not a person passed over the road, unless he paid toll at the little shanty on the dug-way. Five dollars apiece for each human passing by the gate, was charged, except in the case of Jake Johnson, stage driver. Why he was left out, no one could rightly guess.

Byron Cavendish was returning to his hotel, late one night, from a gambling den down the gulch, when he heard a footstep in his rear, and turned just in time to catch a faint glimpse of a dark figure, which had been following him.

With a curse, he snatched a pistol from his belt, and fired; but his only answer was a mocking laugh.

While, the next minute, there was a whiz and a whir, and he uttered a piercing yell, as an arrow tore into the flesh of his right side.

He heard another mocking laugh, and then a horse dashing rapidly through the valley, and he knew that his assailant was escaping.

Not possessed of the courage to extract the weapon, he staggered on to the bar-room of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment, where ready hands offered him aid.

And, after the blood had been stanchcd, and the wound dressed, a piece of paper was discovered wrapped around the shaft of the arrow, and handed to the baronet.

It contained a single line, written in a bold hand, and these were the words:

"The 10th of October. Beware!"

CHAPTER VIII

A SURPRISE VISIT

THE Sport, Rosebud Rob, independent of the accommodation offered by the boarding-house keepers of Cascade City, had reared him a shanty of his own, in the gulch, and kept bachelor's hall.

Although Rosebud Rob did not visit Idyl, this did not hinder their frequent meeting. The Sport was usually sitting in his doorway as she passed homeward at the completion of her day's labours, and it was rarely that they did not have a short chat.

After one of these interviews one evening Rosebud Rob was not a little surprised to receive an interview from the young baronet, Sir Tom Somerset, who still lingered in the mines, although he was growing pale and thin.

He nodded carelessly, and dropped upon the grass before the door of the shanty with a sigh.

"You are Rosebud Rob, eh?" Sir Tom said, staring straight at the Sport.

"I have the honour of being called that name," was the reply. "In what way can I serve you, sir?"

"There is a way—but of that never mind, at present. I came here, as a man, to ask you a few questions, and I trust you will answer them in straightforward manner. Will you not?"

"Rest assured on that," Rosebud Rob replied. "Anything in my power which I can do for a suffering fellow-mortal, I always am ready to offer."

"Then, tell me! how much do you care for the girl-miner?"

"Miss Idyl?"

"Exactly. How much do you really care for that girl?"

"Well, supposin' I were to say that I regard her as a very dear friend."

"No more?"

"I told you I regarded her as a very dear friend," said the Sport. "If I war dealin' in sentimentalism, an' boasted o' her bein' very dear as a sweetheart, most probably I should hev sed it squar' out."

"Very well. This girl loves you!"

"Phew! What's the matter with you?"

Are you a kind o' match-maker—or what?"

"The girl loves you," Sir Tom repeated, coolly. "I know it, even though she never said so, to my knowledge. The girl loves you, and you don't care a snap of your finger for her, while I do. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. You step out of the field—clear out of her sight for good and leave me to win, and I'll make you a present of a thousand pounds!"

"What? You buy me off? Offer me a paltry sum of money to clear out, just so you can step in and win the girl?"

"Yes. I am confident she would turn to me if you were out of the way."

"Well! well! well! this is about the most cheeky proposal I ever received!" Rosebud Rob exclaimed, with a laugh.

"Nevertheless, you accept my offer, sir?" Somerset said, eagerly.

"Nevertheless, I don't do anything of the kind!" the Sport replied.

"And why not?"

"Because, if Idyl Abbey cared a cent's worth for you, she'd not neglect you for a miserable coot like myself!"

Sir Tom bowed his head upon his hands for a moment, then arose and walked away.

"That fellow's a goner, sure!" the Sport muttered, as he gazed after him through the gathering gloom. "Cupid's struck him slap in the heart, with one of those confounded arrows."

Then he rose from the step, and entered the cabin, closing the door behind him.

A bull's-eye lantern sat upon the table and lighted the apartment sufficient for the Sport's purpose.

He first seated himself at the table, after which he drew a package of papers from his pocket.

"Here is the map given me by the Detective-Avenger, Nugget Ned," he muttered, spreading a sheet of paper out before him, "and this is what I want. It is the complicated key to the Secret Mine, which I am the owner of when I find it. But it's a puzzle to study out. Every time I've tackled it so far I've got disgusted and thrown it aside."

"Now, who in the name of Old Harry can make head or tail out of such a mess?" the Sport muttered. "Here on another paper is the key, according to Nugget Ned's understanding, which far surpasses mine, if he knows how to find the secret mine by this trap. The directions are as follows: 'Start S.W., and go N.E. to main trail. Go N.W. to Crook; thence due west to blind canyon; N.W. over mountains; find valley; falls; search.' Now, blast my eyes, if that isn't a fine way to give a fellow information."

I've found the valley and the falls undoubtedly; the next thing is to find the secret mine. He gives me the interesting advice to search for it. But where in the deuce is a feller to search? Ha! a thought strikes me. The falls! What were they inscribed upon the map for, if not of use?"

Lighting a cigar, he continued to go over the map carefully.

"In under where the falls of the map would seem to pour over the precipice is a figure x!" he murmured—"very small, but yet discernible. I wonder if any importance is attached to that? By Jove! I believe I've at last stumbled upon the right clue. The secret mine is somewhere about these falls, and in that mine men are working in golden rock, unbeknownst to the world at large. And I am the only living man who has the knowledge of this mine, except those miners, whoever they are. I am the captain of a band of unknowns!"

"No! you err there. I am the captain in your stead!"

The words rang through the room in a strange, cool voice, and Rosebud Rob wheeled around, to find that he was not alone.

A man stood close by, with folded arms, and masked face—a man, about whose moustached mouth there hovered a peculiar smile.

It was Joaquin, Jr.!

"Well?" Rosebud Rob said, after a pause, "who are you?"

"Sorry I haven't a card!" the other replied, with a second smile. "My name, however, is Joaquin!"

"What! the famous bandit?"

"The son of the famous bandit—the toll-gate man!"

"Ah! yes. I have heard of you. And what is your business here with me?"

"My business is to get possession of that map and destroy it," the Spaniard cried, suddenly springing toward the table.

But the strong grip of the Sport was at his throat, and he was hurled half-way across the room.

"Curse you!" Joaquin breathed, fiercely. "You would have me for an enemy instead of a friend, then?"

"Suit yourself, sir. Friends and enemies are two things I regard as they should be regarded—for instance: there is an individual stalking somewhere about this town as a living specimen of how I quit accounts with enemies."

"I think I have seen him, if you refer to the tough called Cross-eyed Mike," Joaquin said. "You refuse to give up the map?"

"Most assuredly I do."

"Then allow me to bid you good-evening. When we meet again it will be in a different manner, I trust."

About this same time, three men were seated in the room of Byron Cavendish, putting their heads together in the formation of villainous plans.

"The work must be done at once," Cavendish himself was saying, in a savage tone. "I've got to make my stake and clear out."

"Why so? You are not such a coward as to fear that Spaniard, Joaquin?" sneered Devere, contemptuously.

"It is not him alone, that I fear, although his hatred is not to be despised," Cavendish replied. "It is this infernal Irishwoman, who has been following me around, wherever I have gone, for the last week. Curse her!"

"Why don't you marry her?"

"Marry the devil!"

"No! no! you're already joined to him. But, you see, marry this old lunatic, and make her serve your purposes. After you have done with her, Cross-eyed Mike can easily tap her upon the head;" and the man from Custer City nodded toward the third man of the party, who, as he had intimated, was the bully, Cross-eyed Mike.

The bully of bell-punch fame sat in one corner upon a stool, and was rather an amusing-looking specimen of humanity.

His head and face were nearly covered with stained bandages, which plastered his wounds, only leaving his eyes, mouth and chin exposed to view.

"Ef ye want any funerals 'tended to, ye kin bet hyar's w'at is in ther right speerit fer ther bizness!" the giant announced.

"You shall work directly at good salary!" Devere replied. "And now, my lord, what do you say to marrying this old Irish vagrant, who styles herself Mrs. Bounce? Of course, it would only be done in the name, and after we've used her, it will be easy to put her out of the way."

"But in what way can we use her?" the baronet demanded, disgusted with the idea.

"Easy enough. She sits and talks much with the Hermit. Get her to pump out the secret of the *cache* containing the treasure."

"And how about the old man and the girl?"

"I'll attend to that. The Hermit's doom is as good as sealed now. I have got on intimate terms with the cook below, and she is in possession of a vial of liquid one drop of which, placed in the old man's coffee, when I may see fit to direct, will insure his death within an hour."

"Devere, you *are* a villain."

"Not particularly so, my lord. I am serving you for money, else I should not plan thus. Half of that treasure which the Hermit has stored away will amply compensate for a little work like this!"

"Hist!" Cavendish said, in a low tone. "There is a knock at the door."

"The deuce! Who can be coming here at this time of night?"

Both listened. Again there came a soft rap, evidently that of some person who was timid.

"It's a woman's rap," Devere whispered. "Shall I let her in?"

"Yes; we will see what she wants. Perhaps it is the girl, Idyl."

"Never fear. She'd not come here, for she fights shy of us both."

Arising, he approached the door, partly opened it, and peered out into the dark hallway.

A muffled figure pushed forward past him into the room—the figure of a woman, evidently, enveloped in a long, hooded cloak, with a thick veil tied down over her face, which served the purpose of a mask to her identity.

"Excuse me, pray!" a low, musical voice exclaimed, "but I came here in the hope of finding a man whom I wish to see."

"Ah, lady! be seated!" Devere said, setting a chair forward for her to occupy. "Perhaps I or my companion may be able to fill out the bill."

"Is his name Cavendish?" the woman demanded, pointing toward his lordship, who started strangely, an apprehensive pallor coming upon his florid countenance.

"I have the honour of being Lord Byron Cavendish, my lady," he said, with a profound bow.

"Then *you* are the man I seek. I have come for my child!" and throwing aside her veil, Berenice Muriete stood erect, with resolute face and flashing eyes.

Cavendish hissed a curse through his teeth, but a warning glance from Devere caused him to check his anger.

"You, madame? Who are you, pray?"

"Why ask that question?" the mother asked vehemently, "when you know full well that I am the wife of the reckless fool whom you robbed of his child at the gaming-table, in Hayward? I am Berenice, Joaquin's wife, and I have come for my little son—my Pet. Do you hear? I have come either to possess myself of him, or to take your worthless life. You are two to one, but I can murder you both. A frantic mother knows no barrier between herself and child!"

CHAPTER IX

"TO-MORROW NIGHT AT MIDNIGHT"

"FURIES take the woman!" Cavendish gasped. "She is mad!"

"No, she is perfectly sane," Devere replied, a sinister smile illuminating his face. "I'll vouch for that. It is her motherly eagerness to again get possession of her child which causes her agitation. I am almost positive we can strike a bargain. The child is alive yet, my lord, is it not?"

"It was, at last accounts," the English schemer replied, catching his coadjutor's eye.

"But was so securely hidden away that this woman could not find it, were she to search a lifetime?"

"Exactly."

"It is well. In order to obtain her child, she must work for us, you see—must be our slave, to serve us in whatever way we may choose."

"Sir!" Berenice gasped, stepping back a pace. "What vile plot would you instigate now? I'll never lift a finger to serve you!"

"Then by heaven! I swear that your child shall die before another day is ended, madam!" Cavendish cried, triumphantly. "You shall work for us, or my own hands shall feed him to the mountain wolves!"

A deathly faintness seized Berenice, and she reeled back with a gasp and a low cry.

"Go on!" she gasped, her hand clinching and bosom rising and falling heavily. "Go on—tell me what I would have to do to get back my child!"

"Certainly, madame. To begin with, let me assure you that we are an unprincipled unscrupulous pair of knaves, even though it so happens that I am an English lord.

"This fact, however, need make no material difference as to our dealings with you. If you serve us faithfully you shall have your child back, rest assured. Now, the case we have in hand is this. There is an old man named Jason Abbey, who lives in the lower part of this building, and who has accumulated an immense fortune, and secreted it where no one can find it. We want it, and it is to be your business to find out where it is cached. This you can easily do, and report to us."

"And you will give me back my boy, if I do this?" the wife of Joaquin demanded, her hands clasping and her eyes glittering wildly with anticipation. "You will give me back my darling and let me go?"

"Find out for certain where the hidden cache is, and silence forever the old Hermit—"

which job can be easily done—and you shall have your boy and fifty dollars. Do you accept?"

"*Murder!*" Berenice gasped; "foul murder! Oh! no, sir. God help me! I cannot do that—I cannot—I cannot do that!"

"Very well; that settles it!" Cavendish said, arising haughtily. "There is no use for further parley. Devere, show the woman the door!"

Then the poor woman broke down utterly, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

The two schemers gazed at her a moment in silence; then Devere advanced and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Pray do not give way to lamentations, dear lady. Your work is not so terrible, after all, when you consider the future prospect of reunion with your child."

She hurled him back, with a wild gasp, an awful glare in her black eyes.

"Do not touch me, you demon in the shape of man!" she cried, "do not lay a finger's weight upon me. You have pushed me as far as you can. I will do what you have said, no more. And, God help you, if I do not then get back my child, I will tear your heart out. I will rend you limb from limb."

"Never fear; we shall do our share of the compact, if you do yours!" Byron Cavendish said, eagerly. "I will see that the child is ready for delivery when your work is done!"

"It need take but little time for my work, then, and you can send at once for my child. I have but to do murder, *for I already know where the gold of Old Elk, the Hermit, is secreted!*"

"What!" the two men exclaimed, quickly, while they started towards her, with a greedy gleam in their eyes.

"Ay! I know where the gold is secreted!" Berenice cried, waving them back. "I accidentally found out, a few days since, you villains!"

"Then you shall tell us where it is now, or we will murder you!" Cavendish hissed, with devilish triumph, and he drew a revolver from his pocket, as he spoke.

A crafty, triumphant smile flitted to the pale lips of Berenice Muriete, and transformed her, as it were, into an avenging Nemesis.

"Not one syllable of that secret shall leave my lips now!" she said, solemnly. "I shall go on with my work. The old Hermit shall die, and then I am the only living being that can point out the location of the secret cache."

"It will be my hour of triumph then. I will hold the secret, and you shall first

deliver up my child, ere you are let into it. Ha! ha!"

"Stop! You shall never leave this room alive, woman, unless you disgorge now!" Devere cried, savagely. "It's either death to you, or gold to us."

"Kill me if you choose. I am strong now, where I was weak a few moments ago. With me perishes your only hope of getting that fortune, for well you know that Jason Abbey would never reveal the secret, even to save his own child."

The two schemers were staggered.

They knew that she was right.

"You will, then, as I understand it, kill the Hermit, and upon the delivery of the boy, yield up the secret of the buried treasure?" Cavendish said.

"I will!"

"Very well. A woman's word should be sufficient. When will you strike?"

"To-morrow night, at the midnight hour; meet me in the gulch; I shall be ready then!"

So much she said, after which she turned and left the room, no attempt being made by the men to hinder.

In a cabin, some distance south of the hermitage, we will next meet the reader.

The place is newly-built, with the rude simplicity of the frontier, and is untenanted save by two men, who stand facing each other, in one of the unfurnished rooms.

They were the two plotters, Devere and Lord Cavendish, and upon the face of the latter was a sullen, uneasy expression.

"I don't fancy this business in the least!" he growled, savagely. "The idea of my marrying that Irish vagrant is perfectly preposterous."

"Pshaw! I've told you a dozen times that it would be all right. And it is imperative that you should get her over on our side."

At this juncture the door opened, and into the room bounded the eccentric Mrs. G. W. Bounce, with a screech of delight, followed by a smooth-faced gentleman, in black garb, who possessed a very clerical aspect.

"Och! me own honey! me darlint, entirely!" Mrs. Bounce cried, as she espied Lord Cavendish, and rushed into his embrace giving him a regular grizzly hug.

"Hang it, woman, release me!" Cavendish growled, struggling to get away, but to no purpose, for Mrs. G. W. B. hung on pertinaciously.

"Release him, Mrs. Bounce," said Devere. "The Reverend Mr. Weslyn has arrived, and will marry you to Lord Cavendish,

after which he will take you to the hotel, where you will have a happy time, all by yourselves, with no one to interrupt you."

"Shure, an' how do yez do, Mr. Weslyn?" the bride-prospective cried, leaving Cavendish to bounce into the arms of the minister. "Och! wurra, an' be it yersilf that is goin' to bind me darlint closely to my heart, forever?"

"I believe I am to officiate in that capacity, madam," Weslyn replied, shaking off Mrs. B., not too gently.

"Are the parties both ready?" he ventured to ask.

"Both ready," Devere replied. "Mr. Weslyn, I make you acquainted with Lord Byron Cavendish, of England. This Hibernian lady is to be his bride."

The reverend gentleman now produced a book from in under his arm, and in solemn tones began to read a marriage service.

At last the ceremony was concluded, and Weslyn handed Mrs. Cavendish a certificate, which he had previously drawn up.

"Dear lady, that is a certificate of your marriage. Allow me to wish you both much joy!"

"Here, too!" cried Devere, advancing. "My lord, may the good spirit ever bless your union."

"And let me be next to offer my congratulations!" exclaimed another voice, cool and triumphant in its tone, and there stepped from the adjoining room the Sport of the mines, Rosebud Rob.

CHAPTER X

JOAQUIN'S BLOW

A FRIGHTFUL curse escaped Cavendish as his gaze fell upon the Sport.

"How came this devil here, Devere?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"That I am unable to tell you, my lord. I supposed the cabin untenanted."

"And got very much fool-ed, as a natural consequence!" Rosebud replied, with a chuckle. "Mrs. General George Washington Cavendish, allow me to offer my congratulations, and at the same time square up a debt. You know I promised you a hundred dollars, providing you succeeded in wedding this aristocratic British black-leg!" and with a bow, he laid a couple of fifty dollar gold pieces in her hands.

Cavendish wheeled upon Devere, with a snap, his face as white as death.

"What—what does this mean, Devere? I have been fooled—tricked into a marriage with this woman—this Irish vagrant!"

"Oh! wurra! wurra! d'ye mind what

he says?" Mrs. G. G. W. B. Cavendish cried, indignantly, and clinging firmly to her new spouse, she gave him a couple of severe cuffs in the region of his ears.

"Help! Take this she-cat off, somebody!" he roared, lustily.

"Hold up, British!" Rosebud Rob cried, at this juncture; "don't lay it all on your partner-in-crime, but give me credit for a lion's share. Devere had arranged that you should be wedded by an illegal minister, but I willed otherwise."

"What? what?" Cavendish almost yelled—"and this man——"

"Is the Reverend Calkins Smithson, a regularly ordained minister of the gospel!" the Sport replied, triumphantly, "and, consequently, you are legally wedded to Mrs. Bounce—now Mrs. Lord Cavendish. Ha! ha! ha!"

The Englishman uttered a nondescript sound, between a gasp and a groan, and would have fallen, had not the stout arms of Lady Cavendish supported him.

"This is a damnable plot to ruin me!" he articulated, hoarsely.

"Lord Cavendish," said Rosebud Rob, calmly, "you may as well make the best of a bad job, and take your bride to the hotel. Smithson, will you join me?"

And, with bows, the two men left the cabin, and from the door Devere watched them saunter away.

He then turned back toward Cavendish, who stood pale and irresolute.

"It has been a bad ending," he said, "but all the same, I am sure we have got Mrs. C. enlisted in our interests. Take her to the hotel and explain our plans, my lord, and I'll guarantee she'll serve us a good turn yet."

And then, he too, took his departure, and nothing was left but for the Englishman to do as advised, though it cut his pride as it had never been stabbed before.

Many were the curious and amused glances that were levelled at him as he went through the valley with the new Lady Cavendish clinging to his arm, while behind her trailed the enormous train of her huge-figured calico dress.

And though his lordship tried his best to avoid meeting any more of the miners than possible, he was horror-struck to find a swarm of them gathered about the door of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment, among whom he recognized Rosebud Rob, Idyl, and Sir Tom Somerset, in conspicuous positions.

A sparkle of mischief entered the Sport's eyes as he saw them approaching, and fixing his gaze triumphantly upon the Englishman, he cried:

"Hyar they cum, jinnim. He new Lord

an' Lady Cavendish. What d'ye say, now? Git ready—three cheers for the bride!"

And three loud, long yells were given, such as had ne'er before echoed through that valley, and they caused Cavendish's face to redden like a turkey's comb, while Mrs. C. rather seemed to enjoy it.

"There! what do you think about it, now? Do you envy Mrs. C. her choice?" Rosebud Rob cried, turning to Idyl.

"Oh! no! indeed! I rather think she has got the worst of the bargain."

"Don't fool yourself, there. She will make his lordship toe the mark, every time. Somerset, I would speak with you."

And the two young men sauntered away. When they were out of ear-shot, the Sport stopped short, and faced the baronet with a keen gaze.

"I have come here to ask you a few questions!" he said, in his brisk way. "I want to know how you are getting along with our pretty girl miner?"

Somerset smiled, faintly.

"A very good way to hit me a stab, that!" he replied, "when you are doubtless aware that I am not getting along at all."

"Don't misconstrue my motives," Rosebud Rob replied, soberly. "I do not wish to oppose your suit, but propose to further it, having come to the conclusion that you are a square sort of pilgrim, and just the fellow to chaperon the girl through life."

"But is it not impossible for me to win her, when she is plainly fascinated with you?"

"Pshaw! no. You see, I've a peculiar tact for managing these women, who are eternally and forever falling in love with me. Now, then, I believe, that, if Miss Idyl could be disgusted with me, she would turn to you, and you could win her. Therefore, here is a letter, for the purpose. You note that it is directed in a feminine hand, and that it comes from Deadwood. Well, inside, is a cleverly executed forgery, purporting to come from an affectionate wife of mine, who speaks of our family, and asks me to come back to her children and herself, at once, etc., etc. Now, supposing Miss Idyl were to pick this up, and read it—do you believe she would want anything more to do with that sportive individual they call Rosebud Rob?"

"But this would be cruel deception, if the girl really cares for you!"

"Humph, all's fair in love or war. I say to you—sail in and win!"

"And you really propose this scheme in my behalf?" Sir Tom cried, thrusting out his hand, warmly.

"I do, believing you will take good care of Idyl, if you get her."

"Rest assured on that. And I feel almost sure that I can win her now."

"Well, I wish you success. There goes Miss Idyl out toward her claim, now. I will cut across, and drop the letter as I pass along, where she will be sure to find it."

And giving Sir Tom's hand a grip of assurance, the Sport was off across the gulch, whistling merrily, while Sir Tom sauntered back toward the hotel.

Rosebud Rob was as good as his word.

He passed through Idyl's claim in advance of her and dropped the letter, after which he hurried on toward a grocery store, which he entered, and as a pretext, purchased a few matches.

Idyl came to her claim, and was about to gather up her mining implements for the night, when she espied the envelope, and picked it up, curiously.

"Rosebud Rob," she muttered as she gazed at the writing, "and in a lady's hand, too! He must have dropped it when he passed. I will keep it and give it to him to-night."

She gathered up her "tools," and locked them in a plank shanty close at hand, and then wandered, off toward the cottonwood tree on the bank of the stream. Here she seated herself upon the grass, and taking the envelope from her pocket, gazed at the directions a few moments, thoughtfully.

"I wonder what lady corresponds with him?" she murmured, turning the envelope over and over. "Would it be any harm for me to read this?"

Curiosity and sight are the ministers of temptation; the more you see, the greater the curiosity to see more, and it amounts in the end to a capitulation of reason and conscience.

Anyhow, the first she knew, Idyl had the letter spread out upon her lap, and an expression of wonder and surprise crept upon her face as she perused it. It had been written some months before, and ran as follows:—

"DEAREST HUSBAND:

"I write to let you know that I am well, and hope you are the same. Jimmy, our youngest, has just recovered from a severe attack of the measles; but Harry, Bobby, Dicky, Sammy and Thomas Jefferson, our other cherubs, are well and hearty. Dear husband, I long for you to return home, and —"

Idyl did not read any further.

She was quite satisfied with the revelation which had dawned upon her.

"Mr. Mapleton is married," she said, her face suddenly growing pale, "and he

never told me of it! I am now so glad that nothing but words of friendship ever passed between us, for, certainly, no good could have come of it."

Just at dusk the usual evening stage came lumbering into the town, but it fetched not its customary load of passengers, nor were there the usual smiles upon the face of Jake Johnson, the veteran Jehu. One of his horses was limping badly, and the coach had evidently been used for a target for rifle-practice, as it was full of holes and cracks.

And when Jake threw down the lines and leaped from his seat, he swore a good-sized oath that he never would drive "the shebang" again.

A curious crowd gathered at once, and after being duly urged, Jake finally consented to give his late experience, which must have been pretty hard, judging from appearances.

"Ye see how et war," he began, blowing his nose vigorously, "I war fetchin' in a mighty big load o' speculators from Deadwood, an' most o' 'em war purty well heeled, at that. An' w'en we got along at Joaquin's place, ther road war blocked wi' a passel o' masked galoots, who war armed an' ready fer fight. When I fetched up ther stage ter a stand-still, as I generlly do at thet p'int o' ther cumpuss, Joaquin hisself, he steps forth, and demands toll—a hundred dollars fer each an' every galoot, myself excepted. Did they kick? Wal, now, you kin jest bet they did thet same! Wouldn't pay it, said every man, an' Joaquin sed they'd haff to turn back an' go by some other route ter Cascade City, ef they didn't slap down the cash. Then thar war an' attempt ter argy, when thet Joaquin he wouldn't argy wu'th a contynental copper.

"Well, ther long an' short o' et war, b'yees, that a pilgrim finally pulled a 'barker' an' let drive at Joaquin hisself, an' then ther music begun."

"Was the man Joaquin killed?" asked one of the crowd.

"Nary a time. Ther bullet nevyer made him wince, though I ked sw'ar et struck him over ther heart."

"But what do you suppose became of the passengers?"

"Reckon some o' 'em war walted away inter eternity, an' mebbe some escaped or war captured!"

A strong crowd had gathered by this time, and a proposal made to the effect that a band should be organized to hunt the road-pests out of their den was greeted with tumultuous applause. Accordingly

some three-score of volunteers were chosen, and after arming themselves, set out on foot for the toll-gate through the shadows of the falling night.

They were headed by a fellow by the name of Ballantyne.

On arriving at the spot where the toll-gate had stood, they found it a smouldering bed of coals, as well as the building which had stood in the rear of it.

And nowhere were to be seen the Junior Joaquin and his masked followers.

A few dead bodies were found close by, and upon each of them were pinned a paper, containing these words:

"This is not the end! A good beginning will make a bad ending—for the enemies of
"JOAQUIN, JR."

While these citizens of Cascade City were looking after the man Joaquin, there were shadows hovering about their own valley, which boded evil to certain ones.

One of these shadows turned out to be the giant, Cross-eyed Mike Gasket.

The ruffian was skulking about with uncommon stealth, for a man of his size.

As he stood in the dense pall of gloom, and gazed about him, he listened with greedy zest for some sound for which he was waiting.

"Ther gal went up ter ther grocery stores!" the giant muttered, peering expectantly to the south; "an' I reckon she must be comin' back now, purty quick."

With great patience he waited.

He knew that Idyl must pass in that direction, on her return, and he meant to capture her as she came along.

And he was not disappointed!

Soon his sharp sense of hearing caught the sound of approaching footsteps, and drawing a large blanket from his shoulders, he crouched and waited.

Nearer and nearer came the unsuspecting victim—then, she saw a shadow dart in front of her, but ere she could utter a cry of alarm, a heavy blanket was thrown over her shoulders, and she was caught up, bodily, in a strong pair of arms.

She struggled violently, but all to no avail. She was in a clasp of iron, and being borne swiftly away—at first on foot, but now on a horse!

CHAPTER XI

THE MOON-TIDE

A MAN had been following not far behind Idyl, at the time of her capture, and hearing the struggle, rushed forward, but just

in time to hear the night prowler dashing away on horseback.

"I wonder what was the matter?" he muttered, pausing to listen. "Could it have been that fellow, Joaquin?"

And Rosebud Rob—for it was he, hurried on, little thinking that the retreating horseman was carrying away the girl miner.

But, he was speedily aroused from his thoughts of Joaquin, by coming in heavy collision with some individual who was hurrying through the darkness in a direction opposite to that in which he was going.

As a natural consequence, both men were down, in a style not the most graceful.

"Confound your clumsy carcass!" the Sport ejaculated, rising to a sitting posture. "what do you mean by telescoping a fellow in that way, without warning?"

"Ha! I recognize your voice. You are Rosebud Rob!" the other exclaimed, eagerly. "Is it not so?"

"I reckon ye might know by the perfume that exhales from my buttonhole bouquet," the Sport replied. "Who are you?"

"Tom Somerset. I have been searching for you. Where is Idyl?"

"I don't know. Why? Is she not at the Hermitage?"

"No. She started for the grocery some time ago, and becoming alarmed at her absence, I have come in search of her."

Rosebud Rob gave vent to a prolonged whistle, indicative more of comprehension than surprise.

"Are you sure she didn't pass you as you came?" he asked.

"Perfectly sure. I kept watch on either hand, and paused to listen at every few steps."

"Then she's a goner, sure. I saw a female come out of the grocery and come down this way, but it didn't occur to me about its being Idyl. A few minutes ago I heard sounds as if a struggle were taking place, and got here just in time to hear a horseman dashing away. I reckon she has been kerried off!"

Sir Tom groaned aloud.

"By whom? What shall we do?" he asked, excitedly.

"The best thing for you to do," the Sport observed, shoving his hands thoughtfully down into his breeches pocket—"the best thing for you to do, is—well let me see!—to sail in and rescue her. There's a noble scope of territory now for you to embrace and prove that you're really worthy of the little gal. What a grand chance offers for you to fly like a knight of chivalry to her rescue, and become a heroic Apollo in her eyes."

And then the Sport walked away.

The young baronet was not wanting for pluck, and it did not take him many minutes to decide what to do.

"I'll get me a horse, and go after Mr. Idyl," he said.

And without delay he started through the gulch, toward a stable where he kept his own trusty horse.

In the meantime, Rosebud Rob, in going in an opposite direction, met with an adventure, which was at the same time unexpected and uninteresting to him, inasmuch as he had work which demanded his immediate attention.

He was suddenly pounced upon by a couple of men who sprang out of the cover of the night, and before he could defend himself, was borne to the ground, and securely bound.

Not only did they bind him, but they bandaged his mouth so that he could not speak. Then, seizing him, they dragged him aside several rods from the main trail, where they paused.

Devere then removed the bandage, but pressed a pistol muzzle significantly to the prisoner's temple, to enjoin silence.

"So we've got you, eh?" he said, grimly. "I thought we would. Surprise generally catches the best fish."

"Yes, so it seems. Five to one you couldn't have taken me fairly!" Rosebud Rob replied. "Perhaps you will be so kind as to nominate your objective point in taking me thus a prisoner."

"Guess it wouldn't be no hard job to tell you that," Devere answered. "My pardner, here, Lord Cavendish and I, have come to the conclusion that you know entirely too much—ar' much too clever for our liking, and we have concluded to drown you in the creek here, and rid the mines of at least one nuisance. Ain't that so, my lord?"

"That's it, precisely!" Cavendish responded, savagely. Then with an oath, he turned to Devere, who was in an attitude of listening.

"Come! let's tumble this fellow into the creek!"

"Stop!" Devere commanded, raising his hand to enjoin silence. "Listen! do you hear that roar?"

They all listened, and all heard it very plainly.

"What is it?" Cavendish demanded, in excitement.

"It is the coming of the so-styled moon-tide of water, which rushes through this valley every time the moon falls. It is said to be behind time this month, but is coming now without doubt. Come! we must get to higher land. Leave the Sport here. The

water will do the work for him, I'll warrant!"

And turning, the two villains fled hastily from the spot.

The moon-tide was upon the citizens of Cascade City, without scarcely any notice.

Like mighty breakers, the water seemed to roll over the precipice in tenfold greater volumes than usual, and plunge into the basin below with a din that was next to deafening.

People ran screaming toward the higher land, in terror; horses and oxen were heard neighing and bellowing in affright, and a perfect pandemonium seemed afoot.

But it was only for the space of a few moments.

Then the strange tide had ceased to the ordinary flow of water. And in five minutes, aside from the rushing creek, only little pools of water stood in the valley to tell of the remarkable flood that had been.

The citizens came straggling back from their refuge upon the bluffs, and the subject of the flow was discussed with wonder by everyone.

And a curious fact connected with it, was that the entire bottom of the valley was coated with fresh sand, to the depth of several inches.

What would be the result?

Would these sands yield gold, as those had done upon the claim of Idyl Abbey?

It only now required a thorough investigation, by daylight, to learn the truth.

About midnight, three persons stood in a dark shadow which lay behind and around the old Hermit's cabin. They were each armed, and stood in perfect silence like phantoms of the night.

"All is quiet and propitious for our work!" Lord Cavendish said, in a low voice. "The moon is coming out of the clouds, and will light our paths when we get among the mountains—for it is there that I believe the old man's treasure to be hidden."

"Where can the woman be delaying all this time?" Devere growled, his impatience becoming manifest. "It is a quarter past twelve."

"Oh! there's no hurry," his lordship responded. "The woman will not miss the redemption of her child, by staying away."

"Where is the brat?"

"Safely hidden—in the mountain-hut, where Cross-eyed Mike has taken the girl miner."

"Who is caring for him?"

"An old squaw whom I hired for the purpose."

Silence now reigned among the three night-hawks, Cavendish, Devere, and the Irishwoman, whom the baronet had married.

Suddenly a figure glided near to where the trio were standing.

"'Sh!" a voice exclaimed, and the cloaked form of a woman was discernible, although the face was veiled. "'Sh! don't speak aloud. Have you my child here?"

"The boy is where I can produce him within a few minutes," Byron Cavendish said, in hushed tones. "Go ahead, and do your part of the work first."

"I am prepared to, so do not fear. Is the old man in his bed?"

"We suppose that he is—at least, we have seen nothing of him since we have been in this vicinity."

Then Berenice turned and glided away, as silently as she had come.

The two villains peered after her through the faint moonlight, and saw her enter the cabin of the Hermit through the open door.

"That means good-bye to the old cuss!" Devere muttered. "His berth for a trip over Jordan is about as good as spoken for."

With eager impatience they waited.

Soon Berenice Muriete came gliding back into their presence.

"Ha! you have done the work?" Cavendish hissed.

"No, thank God! he was not there. He is not in the cabin."

"What? Ten thousand devils! Has the old wretch escaped us?"

"So it would seem. They say that he has been gone since before dark."

"Who says this?"

"Those in the saloon."

Both Devere and Cavendish joined together in uttering a broad curse.

"We are thus foiled in the outset," the former growled.

"And you are a traitor!" Cavendish raved, turning upon Berenice Muriete. "You are the snake-in-the-grass that has betrayed our confidence."

"Confidence? ha! ha! What confidence have you intrusted in me? You lie, when you call me a traitor! What object could I have? Am I not working to regain possession of my child? Go bring your horses, and we will start at once for the secret cache. But, first, bring me my child."

"That is impossible; the child is far from here. But guide us to that secret cache, and as there is a God in heaven, I will show you where to find the boy!" Byron Cavendish cried, excitedly.

"Very well," Joaquin's wife said. "We shall see how you will keep your word this time."

Devere now left them, but soon returned with four fast horses, which he had provided, and in ten minutes more the whole party were mounted and dashing away.

Berenice Muriete led, and Cavendish, Devere, and the recent bride followed in her wake. At a gallop they crossed the valley, fording the swift creek, and finally ascending the mountainous foothills beyond.

For what seemed hours of time to the rear trio, Berenice Muriete led on—on, through a wilderness of rocks; now over rugged bluffs, along the edges of frightful precipices; then suddenly down sheer descents into black depths, where it was impossible to see a hand before one's face.

Would they never come to the end of this wild journey?

Devere growled constantly.

"I'd choose a life of poverty ere I'd come out on such a ja'nt again," he said, with a fierce imprecation.

At this juncture, Berenice gave a little exclamation and drew rein abruptly.

"What is it?" Cavendish demanded, riding eagerly forward. "Curse me if it isn't a horse tied beside the trail!"

"Yes, a horse," Berenice said—"probably the one ridden by the old Hermit to his *cache*!"

"Curse the man! I thought he was totally disabled by rheumatism."

"But it seems that he can ride. Come! we must dismount, too, and creep after him. I dare say he has not been many hours gone, and he shall not cheat me out of my child!"

They all dismounted now, and after securing their animals, crept cautiously on over the rugged trail, Berenice in the lead.

On—then, they all paused in front of a black opening in the rocks.

CHAPTER XII

THE GIANT'S FATE

WE must return, now, and follow the ruffian, Cross-eyed Mike, who, with poor, terrified Idyl clasped in his arms, a helpless prisoner, was riding with might and main, out of the valley of the cascade, toward the west.

He, however, did not take the trail which was later selected by Joaquin's wife, but struck into a narrow gap or fissure among the crags, further to the south.

As soon as he had made the table-land, the giant dismounted, and laid Idyl upon the ground.

He had for some time past been aware that she was unconscious by the dead weight with which she had rested upon his arm, and he now saw an opportunity to bind her, in order to carry her with more safety.

This he at once proceeded to do, and after he had accomplished the task, he dashed a little water into her face, from a pool, close at hand.

Presently she shuddered, convulsively, and opened her eyes.

A look of utter horror came into her eyes, as she beheld the man monster, dimly revealed in the moonlight, as he bent over her, with a hideous leer.

"Why have you brought me out into this wilderness?" Idyl demanded, her heart filled with terror for her safety. "Tell me, was it not Byron Cavendish, who hired you to do this work?"

"Wal, now, I jest reckon ye ain't fur off ther groove, my gal. It war jest about thet same galoot as persuaded me ter fetch ye away from ther diggin's, you bet."

"I thought so. What are you going to do with me?"

"Ho! ho! that's easy enuff answered!" the ruffian growled. "Thar's a snug leetle hut on ahead hyar whar I'm goin' ter leave ye in keer uv an old Injun squaw, w'ile I set fer Cascade City, ter j'ine Lord Cavendish in s'arch fer ther old Hermit's gold, o' w'ich I'm a-goin' ter get a sheer, you bet yer boots!"

"What! are these men conniving to rob my poor father of his savings?" Idyl cried, in an agony of alarm and excitement.

"Thet's jest ther ticket they're votin', an' so am I, me lady. I guess as how thar'll be no use fer us ter stay hyar longer, so we'll pull on toward the hut. It can't be fur away now."

And picking Idyl up in his arms, as if she were no heavier than a baby, the giant clambered into his saddle, and urged his horse off into a rapid gallop.

Soon a hut of logs loomed up along the trail; seeing which the giant said, with a coarse laugh:

"Hyar we aire ter yer prison now, an' I'll leave ye ter ther tender mercies of an old hag until my return. Then you shall become Mrs. Cavendish. Ho! ho! hyar we aire," and he drew rein in front of the hut, or Indian lodge, which was built of a variety of materials, such as adobes, saplings and skins.

There was a single doorway, and in this stood a slovenly-clad Indian woman, who had been watching their approach with evident curiosity.

As Cross-eyed Mike dismounted, with Idyl in his arms, she managed to position

herself so as to fill up the best share of the aperture.

"Ugh! What pale-face want?" she demanded.

"Oh! thet's all right, gelorious old flower o' ther wilderness," the giant replied. "I've fetched ye another dainty morsel fer ye to keep watch over."

"Wagh! don't want 'nudder," was the decisive answer. "White man got wrong place."

"Oh! go 'long now! Don't ye s'pose this old race-hoss knows his course? Don't ye s'pose I reckonize ther Blue Bell o' ther Crows?"

The face of the squaw suddenly lighted with pleasure at the words.

"Ugh! me Blue Bell," she said, with evident pride. "Pale-face speak good to Blue Bell. She do whatebber he want."

"Know'd it," the giant said, leering down into Idyl's face, as he stood her upon her feet, first having cut the bonds which bound her ankles.

Then, seizing her by the shoulder, Gasket pushed the girl miner into the hut, and then handed the hag a revolver.

"You just keep every galoot away until I come, and ye shell hev gold 'til ye ar' so dazzled thet ye ken't see naterrally fer a week. D'ye hear?"

"Blue Bell hear berry much. She do as white man say."

At this moment there was a childish scream from the inside, and a grim expression came over the squaw's face.

"What's that?" Cross-eyed Mike grunted, suspiciously. "You've got a boy in thar, Blue Bell; tain't no Injun brat, nuther."

"None of pale-face's business," Blue Bell replied, angrily. "'Nudder pale-face leab boy."

"Phew!" and the giant gave vent to a prolonged whistle. "Ten to one it's ther boy Cavendish hes got, w'ich b'longs ter thet Joaquin's wife!"

"Ugh! Cavendish!" Blue Bell assented, with nod. "He pay Blue Bell heap gold for keepin' pappoose."

"He told you thet, did he?"

"Um!"

"Waal, now, just don't ye suck thet shennanigum fer a cent's worth, old beauty. Old Cavendish hes bin imposin' on yer conferdunce. He's broke—hain't got the scent o' a copper about his togs—bank's closed ter wait fer resumption, ye see."

"Wagh! mean he got no money?" the squaw demanded, wildly.

"Jest that, perzactly. But, don't git on yer ear. I'll pay fer ther brat an' ther gal both, an' ye jest keep allother hoomans

away frum hayr. Heer's ten gold dollars fer ye. Now, d'ye heer? ef any one comes nosin' around, Cavendish or no Cavendish, you plug it to 'em wi' thet revolver."

"Blue Bell not forgit if pale-face gib her drink whisky," was the cunning reply of the squaw.

Fortunately the giant never travelled without a pocket-flask, and this he now produced, and handed it to the Blue Bell of the Crows.

She tipped it to her thick lips a couple of times, and then handed it back empty.

The giant stared a moment; then, dropping the bottle, vaulted into the saddle, and gathered up the reins to depart.

"See thet ye keep good care o' them!" he said, pointing within the hut, "an' ye shell hev a quart o' thet stuff w'en I come back."

Then, plunging the spurs into his animal's flanks, he dashed away over the back trail toward Cascade Gulch, leaving Idyl a prisoner in the power of the old Indian hag.

On, on he dashed, leaving the table-lands, and descending into the black depths of the ravine.

Suddenly his horse stumbled over some object, and went crashing to the ground head-foremost, hurling the giant far ahead out of the saddle, where he landed heavily upon the rocks, and lay like one dead.

He was not killed, however, only unconscious.

He awoke after awhile, with a gasp of pain, but when he would have arisen to his feet, he made the startling discovery that he was securely bound, hand and foot.

Following this discovery, he crawled into a sitting posture, and gazed around him in bewilderment.

He was lying nearly in the same spot where he had fallen, as he was able to determine, for only a few yards away lay his horse—dead!

Beyond this a little camp-fire had been built, and its blaze lighted up the darkness of the black ravine, and around it a couple of persons were pacing, in conversation the while.

The giant muttered a curse as he recognized them.

One was the Spotter-Sport, Rosebud Rob, while the other was none other than the girl eccentric, Baltimore Bess.

They seemed to have heard the giant's expletive, for they turned toward him, and then approached.

Without first speaking, they seized him, and dragged him forward into the firelight.

Then they let him go, and stood gazing down upon him.

"Well, sir ruffian," Sport exclaimed, after

a short pause, "what have you got to say of yourself?"

"Cuss ye!" the giant growled, his bias eyes glittering wolfishly. "Let me up. What d'ye mean?"

"We meant hang a few moments ago. I don't opine we've changed our mind any—eh, Bess?"

"Nary one bit!" the dare-devil assented. "We two fellers hev assembled together in solemn conclave, an' we do sw'ar, an' agree, that a notorious rough by ther appellation uv Cross-eyed Mike, have got ter go trouting up river Jordan. Them's ther precise constitooshunal plans an' specifications o' this hyar court, you bet yer stogy boots."

"Cuss ye!" the giant breathed again, vainly endeavouring to burst the thongs that bound him. "I tell ye ter set me at liberty, or some 'un 'll git hurt, now, purty quick. I don't want no more monkey-mockin', nuther."

"Ha! ha! that's the ticket we vote, too!" Rosebud Rob replied. "We want you to dish out your best, in about the twitch of a mule's ear, or up you go to glory!"

"What d'ye want, then?"

"You know that, without asking. We want to know where you took Idyl Abbey, the girl miner!"

"Go find out—I'll not tell ye!" the giant replied, with an evil grin. "She's whar you'd nevyer find her, ef ye war ter s'arch a thousan' years."

"You need not try that game," the Sport said. "We ain't dealing in that kind of stock. You've got to either tell us where the girl is, or swing, and that in mighty short order, too. I won't tolerate trifling, in the least."

"Oh! ye won't, won't ye?" the giant sneered, savagely. "Wal, ye kin jest go ahead an' stretch my neck as much as ye please, for I won't scare inter tellin' wu'th a whale."

"Then hang you shall, and we'll find the captive afterward. Bess, gal, fetch the halter."

The girl dare-devil nodded, and advancing into the gloom of the ravine, where their horses were concealed, she procured a long, stout lariat, and returned.

With a coolness befitting one of twice her years, Baltimore made a noose with one end of the lariat, and slipped it over the giant's head, shirring it snugly about his throat.

Then the Sport, turning to the giant, said:

"Come! If you have any desire to live, tell me where to find the girl, within five minutes, or you die!"

"Will ye set me at liberty, ef I tell ye?" the ruffian demanded.

"Not at present!" the Sport replied. "You cannot catch me with chaff, you'll find. I shall require you to accompany me to where you have concealed the girl—ay, perhaps further. Do you know the location of the treasure-cache of the old Hermit?"

"Nary a know. Wish I did."

"Well, will you tell me, or rather guide me to the place where Idyl is concealed?"

"No. I'll be hanged furst."

The giant was evidently determined to die, rather than to yield the secret.

Rosebud Rob saw this, and was at a loss how to act, and so called the girl dare-devil to one side.

"The ruffian is obstinate, even in the face of death," he said, in a low tone, which he intended should not reach the giant. "I am puzzled whether to lynch the devil, or let him go, or take him with us."

"Lynch him!" Bess said, sententiously. "Just guv him another show, an' ef he don't snatch it, why, simply—lynch him! Let me pull ther rope, ef ye're skittish about it."

"Which I am not," Rob answered.

They returned to the ruffian, and seizing the lariat, dragged him to a place where a single tree grew in the canyon, shooting out a few naked branches, as if in preparation for just such occasions.

"Your time is up!" the Sport said, as Bess tossed the end of a lariat over a limb, and then seized it again. "I ask once more, will you tell me where Idyl Abbey is, or will you die?"

"Let her slide!" the giant said. "I'll see all the mysteries o' Inferno afore I'll tell——"

Time was not given him for saying more, for Bess gave a "reef" on the lariat, and the combined strength of herself and the Sport was sufficient to draw the giant into mid air.

The lariat was then fastened, and hurrying to their horses, the two regulators dashed away.

CHAPTER XIII

"WHAT SHALL THE HARVEST BE?"

WE will now return to the treasure-hunters, whom we left in front of a black entrance which led into the bowels of the mountains.

"This is the place," Joaquin's wife said, peering ahead into the blackness. "In here the old Hermit conceals his gold

'Tis a catacomb of caves, and we must go slow and sure. Each man light his lantern, and prepare to follow me."

The order was at once obeyed.

Berenice leading, they entered the grotto.

At first it was low and narrow, but the further they advanced it widened like a funnel, and continued in this manner for several hundred yards.

Then they suddenly found themselves in a mammoth cavern where their lights were useless, for plenty of this commodity streamed down through a large hole in the dome above. This light told them that morning had dawned upon the mountain peaks in the outer world.

The inside of this inter-mountain chamber was a wonder in its natural beauty.

Commencing at the right hand a natural corridor wound up the rugged sides of the cavern, making three tiers of galleries, and reminding the spectator of a Roman amphitheatre.

The three treasure-hunters, headed by Joaquin's wife, paused to gaze upon the awe-inspiring scene, before advancing further.

Berenice then led the way out into the centre of the glassy surface, closely followed by Devere and his lordship and his wife.

Pausing in the centre, as nearly as she could guess, she glanced sharply around, and soon knelt beside a crevice in the surface, the shape of a square.

Drawing a knife, she set to work, and pried up a block of rock, and hurriedly pushed it aside. Then, by the aid of a strap, she lowered her lantern into a sort of pit below, following it with her piercing gaze.

A cry burst from her lips, and she drew back involuntarily.

"It is gone! The old man has been here!" she said.

A savage curse burst from the lips of Cavendish, and, springing upon the woman, he dragged her back upon the floor, and placing his foot upon her breast, drew a revolver.

"The fiends take you!" he hissed, fiercely, and before either Devere or the Irishwoman could prevent, he took deliberate aim and fired, twice in succession.

Poor Berenice gave but a single answering groan, then her spirit fled; she was dead.

"In the name of Heaven, why did you do this?" Devere cried, aghast. "You have not only done murder, but you have forever killed our chances for getting possession of the Hermit's gold."

"Bah! 'tis easy to track the ould divil now," cried Mrs. C., excitedly.

"Of course," agreed the Englishman.

"Ha! look there."

He pointed to one of the upper corridors, where, on looking, all beheld the head and shoulders of Old Elk, the Hermit, suddenly draw out of sight.

"By Heaven! 'tis the Hermit," Devere cried, jubilantly. "Hurrah! let's roust him out of that! The golden treasure is now ours."

And yelling like so many savages the two men ran to the foot of the natural ascent, and began climbing upward into the galleries.

Mrs. C. did not follow them, but turned and retreated into the funnel entrance.

Eagerly on and upward the two villains clambered, their eagerness encouraging them to extraordinary exertion. Puffing and panting they kept on until but a few yards intervened between them and the old Hermit, who stood in front of a large leather sack which lay upon the floor. The old man stood with one of his stout oaken crutches upraised, evidently determined to fight to the last.

"Surrender!" Cavendish cried triumphantly, cocking one of his revolvers, while Devere imitated his example.

"Keep off, you human fiends—keep off, or I will brain you!" the Hermit cried, in hoarse tones. "You shall not have the gold; I will die in defence of it a hundred times first!"

Alas! it was useless, however, for him to resist. Both men fired at the same time, and with a groan, he fell to the ground, blood spurting from his wounds. Then the human wolves rushed forward, and while Cavendish seized the bag, Devere grasped the dying Hermit by the heels, and both were dragged down upon the floor of the cabin from the galleries above.

Here they paused a moment, to gain breath before examining the treasure, which was heavy enough for several fortunes.

"Where's the Irishwoman?" Devere demanded, suddenly noting her disappearance. "She must die next, and then our trail is clear. Rosebud Rob dead; Joaquin's wife dead; the Hermit and the Irish ditto, and we have triumphed!"

"Curse the woman! Let's first look in the bag!" Cavendish growled.

And with eager hands, he cut the tie-string, and pulled the mouth of the bag open!

Then through the cavern rang a howl of disappointment, coming simultaneously from both men.

The bag was filled merely with fine gravel, which would not have assayed an ounce of gold!

"We have been duped—cheated!"

Byron Cavendish breathed, with a curse. "The old Hermit has secreted his gold, and filled this bag, to baffle us. Quick! before it is too late, we will have the secret from him, if we have to tear out his heart."

"Too late, there, even!" Devere replied, hoarsely as he arose from the Hermit's side. "*The old man is dead!*"

The baronet seemed transformed into a living fury, so frightful were his rage and disappointment.

"We are foiled all around, and the gold is lost!" Devere said. "We have no choice but——"

"To submit to arrest!" cried a cool voice.

"In the name of the law, we arrest you both for the murder of Old Elk, the Hermit, and numerous other citizens.

And scarcely before the two villains were aware of it, they were securely handcuffed and confronted by Rosebud Rob, Baltimore Bess and the lord's wife, who proceeded at once to doff her disguise, and there stood before them in person Mr. George Pearsons, a noted Eastern detective, who, in conjunction with Rosebud Rob, had been waiting for this very hour to arrive, when he could effect their arrest. Pearsons also had shadowed the young baronet westward from New York, under the impression that he was an escaped criminal from Sing Sing; but he had been convinced of his mistake.

The Hermit and Berenice Muriete were buried in the cavern; then, with the two prisoners, the trio of detectives set out on their return to Cascade City.

On their way they came unexpectedly upon Sir Tom Somerset, leading his horse along through the mountains, and in the saddle was seated Idyl, whom the plucky Britisher had found and rescued, as well as Little Pet, Joaquin's child.

Idyl was not told of her father's death until she arrived in Cascade City, and it was lucky, for the shock and what she had endured totally unnerved her, and she lay

for weeks upon a sick bed. Sir Tom was head nurse, however, and she owed her recovery chiefly to his care and attention.

In the meantime, the two criminals received a miner's trial, and, upon being proven guilty, were lynched without delay.

Idyl finally recovered, and one day asked for Rosebud Rob. Upon his appearance before her, she said:

"Mr. Mapleton, I have had a strange dream concerning my poor father's buried treasure: that you knew where it was concealed. Is this so?"

"Ay! even so, Miss Abbey. I and Pearsons found out where the gold was by trailing your father by stealth to the spot, and when he had gone, we entered the cavern, found the gold, and reburied it in another place for safety, substituting a bag of gravel in place of it. It will give us great pleasure now to place in your hands a fortune. I will go for it to-day."

He kept his word, and set out for the cavern at once. Upon arriving there, another surprise greeted him.

Upon the grave of Berenice Muriete a form was lying, cold and silent.

It was Joaquin, Jr.

"Poor fellow!" the Sport muttered. "He has not long outlived his wife, whom I believe he loved sincerely. I will leave him as he has laid himself. The boy still lives, and I hold the map to the secret mine, which, I take it, is beneath the falls. Heigh-ho! I wonder 'what shall the harvest be?'"

Securing the treasure, he returned to Cascade City and delivered it to Idyl.

Enough wealth was there to keep the girl miner weighing for a week; and, it is said, she and Sir Tom (for they are soon to be married) will be independently rich. Little Pet is to live with them.

The Spotter-Sport is still in Cascade City, as is Baltimore Bess. Pearsons has come East.

THE END

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